


Beauty KILLS THE BEAST

*Stories for the Young at Heart
on Love and Self-Respect*

ASTRID HOFFMANN



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To Sophia, Christine, Maximillian, and Konrad, my
beloved nieces and nephews who are just starting
their journeys in this world. Love you all!

Introduction

Have you ever received a spiritual message so deep and powerful you just could not let it go? Well, that's what happened to me when I received this calling to write and spread a message of hope and love. Fight is what I did first. I fought myself—my capacity to put together a story and make it significant and appealing for somebody. Suddenly, all my ghosts came to drag me down from the possibility of doing something meaningful for others and myself. I was so scared!

Life has taught me to be strong and resilient, to get up if I fall and to ultimately listen to the big voice that is within me, the one that connects me to my higher self, to God, to Spirit, to the Divine, or however you want to call that positive force that lives within you. This new writing idea caught me off guard, made me face my fears and insecurities, and made me look at my true ability to reinvent myself, to forgive myself for all those imperfections, and to see myself as the creative being I am. So this book was written for you and with you in mind, for I believe we are all equal, although not the same, bounded by our willingness to rise above our limitations and make of our lives the best journey we can.

I'm sharing with you here four stories, mainly guided to open some eyes and hearts and—why not—maybe give some force for a better world. The topics came to me almost shifting from the

subconscious to consciousness like water, fluidly and natural. My heart wanted to write something that would call your attention, maybe give you a hand or at least raise your awareness about issues out there that are affecting people like you and me, but especially young hearts forming their set of beliefs in life. I have always believed in the power of love and the sharing of truth and honesty. The four stories you are about to read have been written with a genuine and respectful heart, with the hope to help you find your strength and love yourself some more. I'm confident you'll find this book helpful.



The Girl in the Bubble

THE LANDSCAPE

Hot wind blew steadily over the dusty fields, red grime sticking to every surface, leaving it looking aged, used, and abused. Far on the horizon, the red, sandy mountains framed the views of the valley, giving it a desolate, lonely look. It was fall—it was always fall in Dust Valley—but no leaves fell, no cold announced the coming of the seasons, no change ever happened. The landscape seemed at first monochromatic and still; no life seemed to have walked it. But as all things, it had a skin and a soul. In the depth of silence, life went on.

THE ENVIRONMENT

The air was thin and the soil loose. Earthquakes shook the surface now and then. They came with a tremor and a deep cry that quivered the hardest of souls. Scarcity seemed the rule, so everybody played the role of lack, trying to steal from each other to have more—well, to believe they had more. Ideas were neither shared nor cherished; they were stolen in the darkness of the night and made glorious on somebody else's shoes. A clever society it was, living underground,

coming to surface only when a gain was at hand, always wearing a mask.

THE FEELINGS

You would say it wasn't pleasant, this world, but she didn't care much about it, for she had never touched it anyway. Life was always moving slowly in her realm, and so she remained observant but detached. She had always been protected but limited in her movements. Fear had come to live in her heart, and a deep disbelief in herself ruled her every breath. She lived in a crystal sphere so precious, so smooth, so perfectly confining that she had not even noticed it. And so she went through the world.

Her capacity to build relationships was reduced by the light (or shall we say, the shadow) of her low self-esteem. Hey! How could somebody so insignificant be worth attention? How could she deserve the good if she had so little to offer? She didn't stress much about it, though; the thought of it wasn't worth her time, and her pity was deeply embedded in her DNA. Plus, she had a script to follow, and that was what mattered.

THE IMAGINED. THE DESIRED. AND THE REALITY

You see, the right people moved out of their parents' house and got married. Oh, then they lived happily ever after! That's what the script said, although no one knew what "ever after" meant or what one had to do to achieve that state. But what if you could break with the script and write one of your own? What would you do? Would you go for that dream you didn't believe in because the idea came from your heart? Would you stubbornly follow the script to be accepted?

Oh, yes! That's what she did. Social beliefs were stronger than

her soul's dream. She had actually never heard her soul's call. *Do all living beings have a soul?* she asked herself. Then where was hers? She had talents, you see, that nobody had, but she had disregarded them, for they were unpractical, unruly, unrealistic. More of an artistic call than a true thing, totally unworthy of being paid attention to in a world ruled by acquisition and status. So she had blocked her own dreams, trying to follow Cinderella and find Prince Charming.

THE ENCOUNTER

Every night she passed by the swamps, trying to move fast to avoid the stinking, poignant odor they expelled. The endless swamps were not for a stroll; they had stolen souls enchanted by a luring song that fogged their minds. But for her, it was the way home—the only way home she knew. So every night, she passed by them in her crystal sphere, ignoring their sounds and cries.

One night, though, she heard a voice that called to her, begged her for attention, charmed her with its deep, soft sound. Although she looked around, she couldn't find the source of that beauty and was forced by the darkness of night to keep moving.

The next night, intrigued by the mysteries of that alluring voice, she slowed her pace and tried to be guided by the sounds. So it was then that she saw him. Her breath stopped, her heart fell in her chest, and her eyes opened wide. In front of her was a giant. His hair was long, wavy, copper-colored like fire. His arms stretched out beyond himself, almost like wings, so impressive she didn't notice his legs sadly stuck to the swamp. Despite this fact, he seemed magnificent. He looked brave, tall, and self-sufficient, like he was king of the world.

She felt for him as she had never felt for anybody, and so she kept

coming back to the swamps just for the pleasure of seeing him. She ignored the smell, ignored the fact that he was prey to the swamp and would never leave it. She didn't see he had already sold his soul to the dark side. Voices warned her, but you know what one does when faced with that; that is not what one wants to hear. Yes, she became a victim of infatuation and stopped listening! She just didn't want to see, hear, or know and went on to build a dream in which she was the princess and he her knight in shining armor. She idealized his figure, forgave his actions, protected his integrity, and turned a blind eye to his shamefulness.

Blindness is not just that of the eye; the heart can become blinded as well. Oh, and he rejoiced in the idea of having captured her sentiments! He bragged about it with the other swamp creatures and laughed so loud that the trees bent to the ground and the birds abandoned the valley. His ego was full; he had captured the girl in the sphere, the one who didn't look down or touch the ground, the girl who lived in a bubble.

THE CONFLICT

Soon after he felt confident of her attention, his manners changed; even his voice changed. The deep softness of his voice acquired a tone of sarcasm, of irony. He became cruel, selfish, and hedonistic. He started indulging in every pleasure he could find handy. She suffered—of course, she suffered—but her crystal sphere absorbed all the pain and every cry. She felt alone, ashamed. How could this be happening to her? She had to be strong. He had smiled at her, and so she belonged to him. What she was living was what she deserved, and she needed to stick with it! Maybe he would change one day, she told herself, when he saw how good she was, when he

realized she was the only one who truly stood by him. So she went and constructed a dream for herself, numbing herself to the pain of knowing her reality was so wrong—pain so intense that it was best left ignored. It was awesome, she told herself, to work hard, be brave, and go near the swamps without any apparent fear, although deep inside, all was boiling and hurting. She could have left this; she had the chance, but she made the choice to stay.

Then he truly took her and made her his prisoner. He grabbed her by the sphere and hung it around his neck on a thick, golden chain. Although she was closer to him, she was now more isolated than ever and psychologically dependent totally on him. His behavior became more erratic and chaotic. He dragged and pushed her in his crazy, rampagous way. He took her to live in the dark gorges of the swamp, under the hills, where the earth had opened its scars, allowing it to bleed forever. The sun never touched this place, and a constant cold gust pierced the bones and filled the lungs.

The caves extending under the swamps and into the hills seemed like an intricate labyrinth, an unruly place for distracted wanderers. She had never been there before, but there was talk in town that lost souls went there to never come back. She cried so much that her bubble was filling up with water. You see, we all have coping mechanisms that help us survive or overcome difficulties. Well, her crystal sphere helped her keep cool, silent, and in constant survival mode. Growing up, she had learned one must be strong, mistakes are not acceptable, errors are for losers, and showing your feelings can cause others to ridicule you. So this sphere grew around her, protecting her, detaching her from the rest. She wasn't a selfish person; it wasn't about that. She was just too sensitive for a world of competition and fake achievements. She wasn't stupid, either. She was actually quite smart, but that she had learned to deny. It wasn't

possible she could be a smart person—ridiculous! Smartness was for geniuses, inventors, and entrepreneurs, not for a girl in a bubble.

The giant kept a grip on her most of the time, but when he disappeared in his rampageous outings, he left her in those dungeons, and she was somehow free to explore. In some rooms, the air was so thick that she hallucinated, seeing strange creatures living cruel lives, torturing others in a constant heat and frenzy. They lived out of their skins just for the fake pleasure, not seeing that they were so empty nothing could make them happy. In other rooms, the air was so thin that it gave her the impression of a heartless, cold, soulless environment. Life there seemed to go around and around, repeating itself. Those who were angry were angry forever, those who felt ashamed felt ashamed forever, those who cried and suffered did so for eternity. There was no learning curve, improvement, or escape from those walls.

It was interesting to see such drama, the girl in the bubble thought, not connecting others' misery to her own. Creatures in those caves looked sad and unfulfilled; it truly caused pity—but to be honest, so did she, with her unwillingness to see beyond her constructed limitations.

THE DEPENDENCY

Every time the giant came home to the dungeons, he blamed her for his suffering. He screamed and yelled and cried and went into such tantrums the whole place shook and the walls moved and shrank. She shook too, but again she managed to have her sphere absorb the fright and the frustration, keeping her life going. She had come to a point where she had nothing of her own; it was total dependency on him, on his words and his will. He had the magic to turn all things around

and make her feel she was the reason he had such behavior, that he was an innocent victim of her unconscious disregard. She bought into it, for sure, and felt guilty for not doing better at keeping his interest.

When one's life comes to this, it reflects a total abandonment of self, living for somebody else's predicaments. She thought she did it all in the name of love, but love is constructive, not destructive, and so one needs to see the reality and turn away. Well, she wasn't ready yet to run for her life. She wanted to save him and be there for him when he woke up from this bad dream they were living.

THE TUNNEL AND THE VORTEX

What if she had left? What might have happened? At most, she would have found herself and built a good life ... if she had learned the lesson, that is. She wasn't ready though. What would she do on her own? What would she say to others when they asked? Leaving would mean being a failure! She had committed to the giant, and that was her destiny. She had to stay and cope with her reality, period.

Days turned into nights, and all seemed like the same for her as well. More crying, more feeling betrayed, more feeling ashamed, guilty, and hopeless. She worked hard, very hard to keep her part of the dungeon warm and food on their plates, but that wasn't enough anymore. Her future had stopped right there, and her present kept repeating itself with no light in sight.

THE ILLNESS

One night, the giant came home with another creature. This thing was small, fast, and made a shrieking sound every time it felt threatened. But the giant seemed to exult with its presence. What was it? A pet, a person, a thing? It happened to be a she goblin,

small and square, with a bitter smell, green skin, nosy and loud, with no understanding of boundaries. She seemed to be everywhere at once and nowhere at all. As the girl in the bubble got to know her, she realized this creature was terribly annoying, fake in her words, immoral in her behavior, a liar by nature, deceptive and false. But the giant celebrated her every word and action, blaming the girl in the bubble for being so untrusting and mean.

They both seemed one for the other, and they were inseparable. They went together on their hunting sprees, leaving behind sadness and destruction, disappearing for ages, no one knowing if they were well or ill, and suddenly reappearing with their accusations, loudness, and crazy acts. The giant sometimes grew bored of the little square goblin, though, and looked for other prey. Then things turned ugly in the dungeons. The girl in the bubble's cry, the goblin's scream, the giant's destructive rage, the other swamp creatures' shivering voices, oh those voices, calling and calling to run for safety. It was a world with no sun and no hope, a world where things were not said out loud but kept hidden so they wouldn't call attention and the urge to be fixed.

Many goblins passed by the dungeons and the giant's hold. They came and went, leaving the giant in an increased, unsatisfied state of mind. He couldn't seem to find himself; he felt so unhappy, so angry with the world. The truth was that he was afraid, feeling such emptiness in his heart that couldn't be fulfilled. His blaming the world and others was just a reflection of his anger toward himself, making it impossible for him to see the light and goodness of things. He looked and acted magnanimously, but in truth, he was a frightened boy with long, wavy, copper-colored hair.

Sometimes frustrations and fears acquire the persona of a strong, self-sufficient individual, somebody who seems on top of all by acting

the bully, by showing off, by needing constant approval and attention. Don't be fooled; that is a frightened ego talking. If one stands for one's own beliefs with love and respect for self and others, there is no one who can bully or hurt one's integrity. Of course, she didn't see that at the moment and thought he knew it all and she had no right to say the contrary.

When he went on adventures with his favorite goblin, he loosened up and acted as a spoiled child with no limits to his will. He wanted to cause destruction, so he did—and just for the pleasure of seeing all else around him suffer, crumble, and fall. The little square goblin, who had no sense of righteousness, jumped and screamed, causing with her enthusiasm more destruction and pain. Could that be called joy? The two of them conspiring for vengeance against all the world.

He was a lavish eater and became so bloated by all the garbage he could ingest that he took the habit of releasing gas. You can't imagine the commotion he could cause! Was that thunder? His issues became more and more bombastic as he indulged more and more in his pleasures. One night he gave off gas that was so loud and so powerful a crater was created in the ceiling and a hole opened to the sky. And so, as he went on with his life, pleasures and noises, holes opened, and the light started to filter into the dungeons.

In the meanwhile, the girl in the bubble was coming to realize she was losing ground with the giant and was becoming more and more desperate, isolated, and sad. Her life's purpose of loving someone, her dreams of a happy union, her own small pride, all were collapsing and showing her how lost and empty she was. It's interesting, though, how sometimes misfortune opens our eyes, and we start seeing things differently. She discovered the holes in the ceiling and saw that stars were shining up in the sky. They were little sparkles that gave her hope and a sense of realization. Suddenly it hit her: the giant wasn't

such a magnificent giant anymore. He was losing ground in her heart. He wasn't the center of her universe anymore.

One day, when the light seemed brighter than others, the girl discovered some ancient scrolls written in the most precious golden ink. It wasn't that she discovered them, but like magic, they fell beside her as she passed by a tall shelf packed with forgotten items from times no one could remember anymore. They were beautifully made, in rice paper thin and soft, with reams of color and an intricate garland at the edges, written in a magnificent calligraphy. They talked about light beings, the power of self, and the call of the divine. She had never seen anything like that before. At first she felt afraid, for their message was so direct, as if they had been written for her, but as she began studying their writing and becoming more familiar with their words, she started to discover things in herself and her surroundings.

As she moved through the dungeons, she started meeting other people like her, who had a good heart but had lost it for disregarding themselves and following fallen causes. They shared their stories, and although they were all in a sort of misery, just being able to talk through their issues gave them relief and a sense of hope. They were learning from each other and becoming aware of their mistakes. It was then she started giving a closer look to the ancient rolls and understanding their words. One night as she asked for help, a light being appeared. It was beautiful, shining rays of white, blue, and purple light. It had no shape, just pure light flowing in the air. For the first time, the girl in the bubble no longer felt fear. For the first time, she felt joy in her heart.

The light being became her friend and followed her wherever she went. It appeared when she most needed it; she could feel it by her left shoulder. By the color of its light, she knew how things would

turn out and felt so protected, so relieved she had somebody on her side to help her. One night she asked the light being for its name. It responded with joy because she had asked and wrote its name in big letters of fire floating in the air just in front of her. His name was Kahlo, and he had come to guide and teach her in her journey out of the dungeons and the grip of the giant.

Of course, it wasn't in her plans to leave the giant. The script never talked about leaving the one you should hold devotion to. But just having somebody on her side gave her hope and filled her heart with happiness. Her days with the giant became more bearable and easy to take. Still, each goblin he brought in was a threat and a hurt, a knife cutting her veins and hurting her soul. But Kahlo was there to give her light, keep her strong, and show her the way. She kept him a secret though, so nobody could hurt him or take him away from her. With Kahlo's presence, she felt stronger in her explorations and learning and started to gain a larger appreciation for those holes in the ceiling, for through them she could see the sky and watch the stars.

THE CRY

Each star gave her a wink and flattered her with its spark of light. She began to wonder how things would be out there. Had anything changed since she left? It had been so long ago. She had moments of lucidity and bravery, where she dreamed of a life in the sun and a smile on her face. She didn't need much, she had nothing anyway, and that gave her comfort and gratitude. But then the fear kicked in, and all turned black and impossible; her dreams turned to ashes, and her hopes were shattered in the helplessness of self-doubt.

Fear, fear, fear ... such a horrid feeling. It can be one's worst

enemy—the blocking out of everything, the destroyer of hope. Fear is a limiting belief, so large it can cause us to freeze and become unable to take any action. It speaks of defeat and limitations. It comes when one feels one cannot change or do more than what is known. It can kill dreams and sabotage growth. The only way to fight it is with love—pure, unconditional love that comes from a deep conviction that one's soul is worth much more and therefore deserving of the chance to try and try again.

She needed help desperately and was crying out in her misery in the hope of capturing attention. She had hit rock bottom and had nowhere to go but up if she wanted to continue with her life and make something of it. Kahlo came into the girl in the bubble's life with that purpose, and slowly he gave her assurance she could make it out of her limiting thoughts and into the light of growth and fulfillment. It wasn't an easy task, for sure. She was one true stubborn creature. But he was moved by love, and he was going to see her through this.

THE DARKNESS AND THE LIGHT

As moments of darkness passed, larger periods of light arrived, and with them, a sense of separation from the giant gave the girl in her sphere a larger sense of space and freedom. She still dwelled in the dungeon with its ghosts and horrific creatures, still felt for the giant and was unable to take the long path to the surface and the light, still held to her sphere as her protective device. But now there was Kahlo by her side too, and that force, that inner voice, gave her reassurance that she could gain control of her life again.

As she smiled with her dreams of freedom, the giant turned jealous and extremely mean. He laughed at her, offending her with cruel words, making her feel unworthy of the thoughts she was

having and guilty to ever have thought them. It was like living on a swing; at one moment, she was up, and the other down, up and down, up and down. In the darkest moments, her heart hurt with self-pity for her inability to move forward, but then, when the good feelings came around, she felt overwhelmed with hope and gratitude.

At times of awakening, one feels the deepest instabilities, like all is shaking with no precise purpose, with no real shape. At the turning of a life, changing is one of the hardest tasks for an insecure soul. But she was on the brink of making that change to construct a better reality. That was what she thought, until the giant came in and spoiled the whole process.

He wouldn't let her breathe and tightened his grip on the golden chain with every attempt she made to gain control. Her freedom was not part of the contract, oh no! He had brought her to the dungeons to serve him and make him feel superior. She couldn't then be better; that was just unthinkable.

And so they went from dark to light and back again, moving one step forward and three steps back. Her inability to break free from the giant, accepting instead everything he said and wanted, was eroding her hopes and what little strength she had. Her self-sabotaging thoughts were not allowing her to gain control of herself, and sometimes not even the good energy of Kahlo could help her. She had faith in him, though. He was the force that kept her moving. It was reassuring to feel his light above her shoulder; there was no doubt of that. Still she was taking baby steps in her growth, and that sometimes caused her deep frustration. You see, it's impossible to reverse what has been done and hard to change a mind-set of learned behaviors that have become so embedded in one's soul that only a rebirth of the self can make a difference and make it possible. But

that takes immense courage, for one must break free from habits, from one's comfort zone, to come to life again.

So she was living between the giant on the dark side and Kahlo on the bright side. One dragged her down, the other gave her hope. Kahlo as a light being was a pure source of energy, an angel that had come in a crucial moment of the girl in the bubble's life to help her cope, survive, and move on. The faith he infused in her was like medicine, the only light she had seen after a long time of darkness. His sole purpose was to give her protection. On the contrary, the giant had no purpose in her life but that of self-satisfying his needs just for the sake of feeling less troubled and sad.

One night, as she was reading the scrolls while the giant was asleep, she raised her head to look at him. The body that was lying there seemed that of a dead man, a sad mass of lifeless flesh and bones. She didn't recognize him, didn't know him at all, and she didn't feel sad for it ... and a crack opened in her sphere.

What was she doing here? What had brought her here? Her heart now felt empty, and her tears had dried up. Her only thought was on the stars up in the sky with their sparkles and their light ... and another crack opened in the sphere.

She knew now she had a choice and had acquired knowledge of the possibilities ahead for her to improve her life and be happy. Her faith in her higher self and the forces of the universe helped her embrace the feeling of not being alone ... and another crack opened in the sphere.

WAIT! STOP

Are you the girl in the bubble, or are you the giant?

What is all this about? Do you know or can you visualize what is

being talked about here? Do you know of someone living a life like this? Do you feel it could be you? Have you done something to help that person, to help yourself?

Yes, this is about emotional abuse, which can be as dangerous and damaging as physical abuse. The only thing is that it goes underground, and it can be invisible. Although the story told here is a metaphor for what an emotionally abusive situation can be, I hope it has so far opened your eyes, heart, and sensitivity to the issue.

At a very young age, we build our set of beliefs and unconsciously construct our behaviors, things we learn from observing and being taught how to move through the world. If nobody comes to notice what moves and shakes us, we carry our baggage and keep expanding it throughout our lifetime. Criticism, competition, jealousy, achievements, honors, desires pile up in our lives, blocking our light and weakening our vibrations. If one doesn't pay attention, one can end up living a very superficial life, with false pretenses and an unhappy heart.

You may ask what this has to do with emotional abuse. Everything! Emotional abuse doesn't come just because somebody wants to inflict it on you; it comes also because one allows it. And why does that happen? Well, when one's heart is broken or even closed, when one doesn't truly believe in what is possible beyond one's fears, when one has an urge to sacrifice oneself for the sake of somebody else, it might stem from a case of low self-esteem.

Low self-esteem comes from a heart of limitations induced at that young age when the baggage starts to pack up, and it is then carried on through to adulthood. The persisting feeling of unworthiness can cause great damage to a person's spirit, making it opaque and vulnerable to undesirable influences. Like the girl in the bubble who fell prey to the giant and ended up causing herself more pain than

she deserved. Yes, one cannot just blame just the giant. The giant was the abuser, but the girl in the bubble allowed him to abuse. Not being able to stand up for oneself can be a painful task, and getting out of the mess requires a long and steep learning curve. But you know, there is a cure for all maladies, and that is love—love for oneself first, which then can be spread to others. We are not talking about selfishness and vanity; those are created by fear and the ego. Love, in its true meaning, comes from the soul through an open heart and is the reflection of the divine unity of which we are part. Because we live in a material body, we have embraced the limitations it causes us, but in truth, we are all energetically connected. Does the knowledge of this give you reassurance that we are not alone and that all goodness can shine through us for a better world?

You may ask, where is love when I have no food on my plate? Where is love when my father just hit me in the face? Where is love if so much pain is inflicted in the world? Love is the force that shines within you, and so it is the light that shines through you into the world. Each act of goodness to yourself is a seed that spreads more love to others and makes this world a better place.

But you have a point here: love cannot be shared unconditionally if we haven't learned to forgive. Forgiveness is the opposite of fear, as love is the opposite of the ego. Through forgiveness we expand our boundaries and lighten our vibrations, so that love can come in. This is the formula: forgiveness + love = gratitude. Ah! Gratitude for what? Gratitude for everything! For every lesson learned, for all I have been given, for all that I thought I wanted and didn't get, for being lovable and loving and for having forgiven myself for all apparent mistakes one can make through life, and finally being able to shine as my true self.

What do you think the girl in the bubble should do? How should

she behave and react to the giant's emotional manipulations? Do you think she can stand up and take the path to freedom? And if she does, do you think she will be free from falling into the same trap again? What would be your advice to her?

What would you say to the giant to help him out of his miserable acts and constant self-defeat? Oh yes, he is a victim too, a victim of the ghost he's carrying on his shoulders. He too suffers from a low self-esteem; the only difference is the way he expresses it to the world. What would you say to the bullies in the world that destroy lives without considering the consequences because they carry such anger?

What do you think of Kahlo? What does he represent? Is he real or is it that voice of the soul that goes deeper and knows better? Can he be a true angel that came to help the girl in the bubble? Do you believe in angels? What makes you think one way or the other? How do you feel about light beings that could exist just for the higher good of all? Do you think they are possible?

Are you curious to know what happened to these two? Let's go and explore how their story unfolds ...

THE TRUTH

One day when the sky was shining through to the dungeons, the girl in her sphere took the path to the surface. The narrow path had a steep slope and high walls, which had insets that held the ugliest little creatures that could exist. But these creatures couldn't stand the light. Once exposed to it, they burst into flames, screaming and cursing as they pleased. As the girl in her sphere tried to move up the path, she encountered them on her way. They jumped on her and through the cracks in her sphere, began pulling her hair, scratching her skin, destroying her clothes, trying to poke out her eyes and cut

her tongue. The girl in the sphere was frightened by these creatures that seemed to have an endless energy and had viciously taken it out on her. Curiously though, she had been more afraid about life in the past, when she knew she was trapped, when she had no true purpose. Although now the situation seemed more alarming due to these aggressive creatures, her growing faith in something bigger than herself was helping her move forward. She found the courage to face these little things and call them by their names. As she did so, a ray of light shined through, destroying them as she passed. She was gaining control of the situations happening in her life, and with it, achieving a higher level of confidence.

When something scares you, troubles you, and makes you feel low, just look at it in the face and call it by its name. This seems to be the perfect formula to fight ghosts, trolls, and all sorts of fears that might show up on your path in life. There is nothing a frightened ego avoids more than being faced with truth and courage. Once you face it, it loses power over you and can no longer cause damage. The girl in her sphere was coming to this realization and embracing it with joy.

The sphere was becoming heavier as she moved upward, and more cracks were appearing in its one-time smooth surface. Debris was entering the precious sphere, and the girl was constantly forced to stop along the way and clean up her space. As she did so, a tremendous sense of accomplishment filled her heart. Every obstacle she overcame led to a deeper understanding of herself. Every problem she worked through strengthened her self-esteem. Every fear she conquered revealed her true light, her values, her force.

Kahlo had left her on the slopes of the path, his mission accomplished. Now it was time for the girl to find her way and meet other angels that could help her in different ways. She tried to call back to him, though, for she felt she needed the support of his light.

But with love he let her go, for she was ready to start building a life of her own and had to face her ghosts and move through the path to redemption.

The giant had left her too but not with love and care; he had just abandoned her for yet another goblin and was now running in frantic circles trying to chase his own illusions. But for the girl, that was not her problem anymore. He no longer lived in her heart, and so he couldn't threaten her with his violence and disrespect. She had left him too in some way.

THE SOUL

As she came to the surface and moved out of the swamps, an array of angels awaited her with feelings of courage and love. The sphere had so many cracks that it was falling apart, leaving big gaps of empty spaces where sun and fresh air could shine in and touch the girl's soul. She was taking risks now and learning to fly and could now see what was beyond her once-limited vision and perception.

Her so obliterated soul was beginning to come through the fog of forgetfulness and fear and stepping into the light. She had a beautiful soul that beamed rays of blue and gold, and for the first time, the girl could hear its songs and its call. What a difference from the dungeons. Here on the surface and in the light, every step counted, no matter how small it might seem, and she was proud. She had lived on the surface before going into the dungeons, but it had never been like this. Everything seemed to have changed; the sky was clearer, brighter, of an intense blue, the air clean, the trees seemed to have acquired magnificent shapes and textures, showcasing their different greens, fruits and blooms, and all birds had returned to the valley, giving it life, movement, and music. Perception is an amazing filter.

The way we see things is a true reflection of our inner energy, of what we think is or is not. When a heart opens, the body vibrates in higher frequencies, and perception becomes more acute, making one see beyond the mere material world and into the soul's truth.

THE CALL

She was discovering her calling and starting to realize what kept her motivated, what caused her disruption, what made her laugh or cry. She also found that giving to others led to a wonderful sense of self-fulfillment. She had always had that in her, though. The difference now was that she gave from a state of love, while before she was trying to please out of fear of not being liked. She used to look for the broken souls in the hope she could fix them; not an easy thing when the broken part doesn't want to become whole. Now she was giving a hand to those who had a similar experience but with a message of love and no expectations to fix anyone but herself.

Every time she took a step forward, a new crack opened into the sphere, making her feel more confident about herself, appreciating her intuition and value in the world. One day the bottom of the sphere fell off, and for the first time, the girl touched the ground. It was thrilling and yet nerve-wracking. She had to go a long way and learn all sorts of things to get to a point where she could consider her confidence a motor to help move her forward and her experiences a tool to keep learning from every step. She was touching ground! For the first time in her life, she was present, here and now.

Curiously, the side of her sphere that looked most intact was her left side. An angel had told her that was her side of receiving and somehow was the part of her that was still holding back, still afraid, still closed to new possibilities. As for all in life, one must find a

balance; when there is too much giving, there is a risk of exhaustion, of being drained by sending everything out and not getting anything back in. We are not talking of asking or expecting rewards for helping others; we are talking about the complex equilibrium between giving oneself and filling oneself with meaning and gratitude. Receiving is one of the hardest things a person learning to love him or herself needs to embrace. It is not selfish; it is necessary for the soul to grow and feed itself with meaning and love. The girl with the broken sphere was learning that, as her left side of the sphere started crumbling as well.

THE POWER OF SELF

The day the sphere broke and totally fell off was a beautiful day with a soft breeze that soothed the senses and brought a smile to one's face. She was standing by the river having a conversation with the butterflies and the fish and the fairies and was so present, so awake and in the moment, that she realized how strong she was, how much she had accomplished, and how much she could give. A profound sense of gratitude filled her heart, and her whole being radiated with love. She had come to a point in her life where, no matter what turmoil could be happening around her, she felt centered, present, and at peace. Others came to her for advice and felt at ease sharing their stories, finding after talking to her a sense of relief and a renewed purpose.

Since the moment she touched the fresh earth, its energy became part of her. She started grounding, connecting, and becoming one with the positive vibrations of the environment. Just as angels had shown up before, she started a friendship with light beings and fairies, and the sweet music of divine love beamed through her to be

shared with the world. She was finally where she was supposed to be but had never dreamed possible.

When she connected with her higher self and trusted her intuitive mind, synchronistic events started happening in her life that helped her grow and find her true meaning. Suddenly the right people started showing up. Contacts, news, events, and all sorts of diverse situations began to happen, all carrying a positive message, a gift, a helping hand, a piece of advice, an encouraging push for her to move forward. She didn't feel alone anymore. How could she? She was living her dream and could sense the power that knowledge generated. When she thought of the past, it was like thinking of somebody else's life, a remote story, totally foreign and detached from her true spirit.

THE UNDERSTANDING

Understanding comes from a deep universal knowledge that one is part of all and all is part of one. Would you destroy what is yours?

The girl was now walking without her bubble of protection and learning to face her fears. She had become open, receptive, and vulnerable to the positive energies she herself was calling upon. You see, when we believe in ourselves, with an open, humble heart and a smile, the universe reacts with equal force to present us with situations meant to help us grow, stand up tall, and walk toward our highest purpose. She was now feeling free and happy. She still had reservations about certain things, but that was helping her be cautious, not fearful and still.

She had a meaningful life and so many dreams ahead of her. Her sense of gratitude, her profound love and respect for all that was given to her true purpose. She had worked hard to get there, though,

and had to rebuild herself, change her mind-set, “kill” her old self to be reborn again into somebody whole, complete in her thinking, in her vision of life, in her beliefs and perception of the world. You see, positive thoughts call for more of the same, and with them come great opportunities, while negative thoughts can fill one’s life with more chaos and self-fulfilling prophesies. She once lived in that realm and found abuse and disrespect; now she inhabited a place of love, self-love, a place where respect is king, faith is queen, and gratitude the carriage that moves them all.

There can be still ups and downs in this world, but by understanding that every experience has a purpose and every situation can be a lesson well learned, one can live in the present, in the now, with an open heart, grateful and fulfilled. There is no one to blame, no one that can block one’s path, no one that can take away what is one’s own. The giant lived now in a place in her memory that was rarely visited, a place where old remembrances were stored and soon forgotten. She had long ago forgiven him and had moved on to better thoughts, letting him go to that better place where memories go. The giant seemed now an old tale, foreign and absurd, a story told so not to fall in its tracks again, a foggy memoire of a life left behind for a better dream.

COME WALK INTO THE LIGHT

Do you feel insecure about your self-worth? Do you feel less worthy than others and therefore put yourself aside to please those that seem to have a louder voice? Do you do the impossible to help others because you’re afraid you might be rejected or disliked? My dear, you are the most beautiful creation on earth, we all are, and as we all do, you deserve the world from here to the moon and back.

We grow up believing what has been told to us and build our reality based on someone else's ideas that sometimes don't match our sensitivity, path, or personal truth. Although we are all equal, we are not the same. Or better said, we don't express ourselves in the same way. Some of us are introverts, some extroverts, some of us are shy, some of us outgoing, some feel the need to share it all, some are more cautious, some are quick, some are slow, but in the sum of all, we all can feel afraid, can sense danger, can be happy and fall in love, and therefore we are all worthy of the gifts and goodness the universe can bring. We just need to believe there is space on earth for us too and learn to listen to our "good" inner voice, the one that comes from love, forgiveness, and gratitude. If we create our reality based on fear and hate, our damaged egos will take over and devour the light that might have lived in us. If I can be honest with you, I was the girl in the bubble and have lived the struggles she went through. I lived for an illusion, not the truth or my calling, and I lived in fear and disbelief of my abilities and capacity to be more than what I thought could be. Once I stepped into the light and started facing my fears and recognizing the true value of my achievement, I started loving myself, and a world of possibilities opened up for me. My path to growth began with forgiveness and a great faith in the good that lives in the universe.

We may encounter people in our lives that cheer us up, that give us a positive hand and help us grow, but we certainly will meet people that will be critical to our way of being and may take us down with their views and beliefs. We can listen, as long as they don't affect our integrity and destroy our inner light. Always look for that truth that speaks from the heart with goodness and love. Don't be fooled by false pretenses, fake promises, and wrong purposes; they won't

help you find your happiness but only satisfy the ego of someone with a twisted life.

Learn to listen to your intuition, learn to pay attention to how your body reacts to situations, always keep a fresh look on things, and be grateful for everything that happens to you, for it comes with a lesson you can take to your positive advantage and build your constructive power from it. Always speak and act from a place of love. You will be empowered.



The Time Traveler

THE TIMES

A vast horizon extended in front of his eyes. Most of what he could see was water—clear, pure water. He had learned that it had not always been like this. Once land had occupied the place of the ocean, and one could go from place to place without the need to take a ship or plane. *That might have been neat*, he thought with a smile. Global warming had changed the face of the world. Storms and destruction had shaped it differently, as did society's brutal behavior. That had been long ago, though, now just part of tales and history, almost forgotten.

The world he knew was at peace, and everybody lived in accord. It was said that society had fallen into corruption, hate, and crass materialism. Money and war had been the mind-set, until all was lost and nothing could continue as it was. It was said that new philosophies and cultural beliefs had emerged in the underground, unnoticed at first, to give birth to a new era of harmony, love, and gratefulness. The new societal structure had forgotten about politics, corporations, and individual interests, and all was run in communal agreement for the good of all. Nothing of what history

told was practiced anymore. There was no communism, socialism, or technocracy; only a true sense of democracy prevailed that cared for everybody. After centuries of decline, civilization had begun to develop new beliefs, and people's mind-sets evolved into one of respect, care, and enlightenment. There was education for all, and all had equal access to knowledge. Everyone had the same rights, and all enjoyed an occupation of their choice. Communities were auto-sufficient, everything was recycled, and nothing went to waste. Peace had reigned for ages now, and prosperity was at hand for everyone. It was a new era of glory and respect, where light and truth were valued over everything else and a high spiritual energy gave force to all good.

He was a content child, almost a man now, close to an age where he could decide what he would like to learn and experience in preparation for adulthood. His family was proud of him, a sensitive soul, a thoughtful son, a faithful friend, grateful, charitable, respectful, and honest. But most youths were like him, ready to learn and help and experience the best of life. One could say motivation was their motto, and a strong sense of respect for what they could offer drove their everyday lives. School was interactive and gave youngsters the opportunity to explore and experience diverse scenarios to acquire knowledge and become acquainted with life and its challenges.

He had many friends who, like him, were full of curiosity. They liked to create things, sometimes composing music to cheer the elderly, sometimes cooking a banquet for all those who celebrated a birthday that day, building a submarine to learn about the underwater world, or farming a self-sustaining vegetable garden to feed the community. They had so much fun with their projects that they sometimes forgot about time or that they had to eat and sleep. But everyone rejoiced in their positive energy, and they were a joy to be around. Reflecting on their forgetfulness about time and motivated

by their curiosity to know what had been or could be, lately they had been working on a time machine. It was unthinkable to experiment with life forms, though, so their self-sustaining vegetables would have to be their instruments of proof. An uncertain thing, to work with lettuces and tomatoes and have them travel through time and space, but the friends' positive attitude kept them always motivated and moving forward.

They had been experimenting for a while with the time machine with no major results. Lettuces were sent to the future and came back rotten and destroyed, and when sent to the past, they returned as seeds. A few days back, they had amazed themselves with a tomato that had appeared on one of the boy's pillows. The day they ran the experiment, they laughed loudly, remembering the encounter and realizing it came from the future and that it had been them sending it there. They were eager to try with themselves yet afraid they might die in the attempt. So they continued exploring, tweaking, and making changes to their great creation.

Some of them wanted to see the future, to help and figure out how to solve ahead of time issues they might encounter there. Others wanted to see the past and learn from their experiences so they would never repeat their mistakes. In truth, civilization as they knew it had already fixed itself, as the old had crumbled to pieces and the new had reconstructed an original way of thinking and behaving. Still, the thrill of seeing things from the source was so appealing they never imagined the danger it could bring to their lives.

THE OLD AND THE NEW

You see, life as we know it today is completely different from life in the future. While we find competition and selfishness today,

people of the future live in harmony with one another. While we see discrimination, people of the future enjoy equal rights and social justice—health, wealth, and knowledge are within everyone's reach. Decades of fighting and destruction, centuries of greediness and ignorance covered the face of earth while silently in the background a new society was being born. It took awhile to pass from an era of information, where all moved outside themselves, to an era of intuition, where hearts were opened and one became aware of the great potential of the self, to finally move to an era of oneness, where the dark, dense vibrations of the past gave place to high vibrational beings that live in harmony with a higher, deeper good.

It was a long and painful journey, though, for the older generations had systematically destroyed earth's legacy. People had to figure out how to build and shape something from nothing and make it a potency of life and light. Radical groups had come and gone, destroying it all as they pretended to occupy territories for the benefit of populations moved by ignorance and fear. As they were eradicated, new groups rose up, repeating the horrors of war and, in the end, bringing down with them all the good that could be known, fought for, and embraced. As old beliefs started fading, they were no longer a threat, and so violence went down the drain, with no one stopping to consider it a possibility anymore.

Life for the boy was full of possibilities, a great field of potential growth, and he never felt alone or hopeless. The enlightenment of self was the great source of all positive happenings, where as if by magic, things happened in a synchronistic way—one just had to wish for it. Life was good, yes, but his intrinsic curiosity kept him moving, wanting to know more, wanting to understand more, to see, touch, and feel it all, even the ugly past.

THE IMAGINED, THE DESIRED, AND THE REALITY

He imagined traveling to the past and being greeted by all as the boy from the future, so cool they would show him around and ask him for advice. They would all be so curious to know how things were working in the future and would start implementing new ideas and maybe make their lives better. It would be so much fun, he thought, and he would be giving a hand to the past to avoid some of the trouble they would have gone through. Yes, it was his dream to be of use, to help rescue a world in trouble, to make it better for all to enjoy.

The reality is our culture and society are not ready for sudden change, and most people live in too much fear to understand the goodness of a new way of being and thinking. All changes, even for the good, take time and need to be slowly embraced through education and love, lots of love.

THE TRAVEL AND SETTLING

The day came when they felt ready to experiment with themselves. It was sunny outside, and a lovely breeze refreshed the air. One of his friends had signed up to travel to the future. So they made all calculations and arrangements and set him to travel. Sweat ran along his forehead; he was excited but so nervous. Of course, he was! Wouldn't you be nervous undertaking such an adventure?

They sent him off, a hundred years ahead of their time. One month passed, and, as planned, they retrieved him from his travels. He appeared in the room happy and rested, with gifts from his encounters from the future. His experience had been so positive, and people he found in the future so receptive, he had a happy heart and

lots of hope in what was to come. Everyone rejoiced in the success and went on to their next assignment.

The boy was as nervous as his friend was but as hopeful as he was, too. He would make a difference, and everybody would greet him kindly, or so he hoped, and off he went to our present time.

He woke up lying on a hard surface, rough and gray. To one side was a green surface that resembled a carpet and made his skin itch, and on the other side was a long strip of a darker surface painted with white and yellow lines. Loud machines raced by, making funny noises and leaving behind an unpleasant smell. Tall walls framed the whole, and some roofs poked up from the other side. He tried to stop one of the machines, but the man sitting inside it yelled at him in an angry manner, telling him words he had never heard before. He started walking toward what seemed to be a gate. A couple in a two-wheeled machine passed by and laughed at him. He couldn't understand what they said, either. As he got to the gate, a man approached him and asked where he was going. Then he requested his ID. As his answers were unclear, the man spoke into a device and waited. Soon a man dressed in black arrived and started asking him more questions. As he couldn't answer, both men became impatient and aggressive. You see, in future times, people now spoke a common language, making it possible for everyone to understand each other. He had studied some of the languages spoken in present time, but to be honest, these two men spoke way too loudly and way too fast for him to get what they were saying. Then the man in black put metal cuffs on his wrists, threw him into his machine, and took him to what the man called the precinct.

They couldn't find any records on him, so they decided to deport him back to his country of origin (assuming he was an illegal immigrant). But they couldn't find any records of his possible origin

either. As time passed and they couldn't keep him in the precinct or take him to juvenile prison—there were no charges against him—a judge ruled he had to be given over to social services and placed in a foster home.

They dragged him to a house where other kids were living under the care of a middle-aged woman. He soon learned she wasn't very kind and hardly ever left her room, except to collect the green paper she piled under her mattress. The other kids were not nice either. As he started to get settled into the room he was to share with two other boys, they all stared at him and joked about his look. When he tried to say something in their language, the jokes went through the roof and became nasty. When he tried telling them he had come from the future, they labeled him as crazy, and some even implied he might be on drugs. Mockery was all he got. Slowly but surely, he started learning about this world and felt a little disappointed, but his positive nature helped him to keep going. The next day, he was going to school. That would change it all.

School was easy for him. He knew all the subjects and got the best grades without having to study a thing. But even here, nobody listened to his claim to be from the future, and more ridicule was thrown his way. The other kids were jealous of him for being a good student with little effort and started bullying him. They destroyed his books, threw ink on his new shirt, didn't allow him to sit with anybody in the cafeteria, sent nasty messages to his e-mail account, and so it went on and on with threats and bad words.

At night he cried. This was nothing like he had imagined. He wished he would have agreed on traveling for a month, but he had requested two years. Yes, to learn and immerse oneself in a community and give a helping hand takes time. As a good scientist and sociologist, he knew that. But the past was not bright, and

people were not friendly at all. He had to be strong, he told himself, to endure and learn. The time would come when people would trust him and accept his help.

The science teacher noticed his brightness and his suffering. She was kind and helped him understand his surroundings. When he confided in her that he came from a faraway place in time, she panicked. He understood he had to keep his truth to himself and went on to explain that he came far from another side of the sea. She calmed down and found ways to help him. She had contacts in a private school where an art teacher offered to help, to see if they could place him there through a scholarship. He was thrilled; things finally started to look good. He had found people he could rely on and wasn't so alone anymore.

On one of his weekend explorations, he went down to the river and found a spot where the sun shone through the trees and the waters ran slowly. It was so peaceful and beautiful he decided to build his home there. Every weekend he went back to his spot by the river to build a place for himself. He would then leave the house, the middle-age woman, and the nasty kids and live on his own. *Great plan*, he thought, with a smile on his face.

The new school was nicer looking and had better resources. The lab was an interesting place, a little like the Stone Age, he thought, but he enjoyed being there. The art classes were cool. They got to go outside and paint what they observed. That made him feel closer to what he knew. The art teacher was nice, too, but a bit of a loose end, not very focused on others' needs and requests. He felt better here, in any case, and decided not to bug her for advice or assistance.

THE ENCOUNTER

One day at a game—what was it called, basketball?—he was walking to get something to drink when he saw her, a slim, petite girl with long blond hair like gold, so beautiful, so ethereal, he felt she had to be from another world. She didn't notice him until several weeks later when he made the move to introduce himself and get to know her.

When he invited her out after school, she was a little reluctant but finally agreed to meet at the café next to school. The condition was that her mother would pick her up. Well, her mother was always late, so they got to share a long afternoon together.

She was a little distracted, always checking her device, which she called a cellphone, smiling to herself as she read the messages that kept coming. She didn't talk much about herself and didn't make eye contact. He thought she might be shy; it was their first time together, after all. In general, though, he noticed all the kids at school walked facedown, looking at their devices, not saying hi when passing by. It was a thing of the times, he understood, when people had not yet learned to openly interact with each other and felt uncomfortable by that open interface. He would help her understand the beauty of face-to-face communication, and together they would make a difference in the world.

They continued seeing each other at school, at the park, and at the café. They had developed a nice friendship, he thought. He liked her very much. She was so pretty, so sophisticated, and a little mysterious as well. He liked that. She was different from all the girls he had met back home.

They had been going out for a couple of months when he found the courage to propose to her. She looked at him in shock and didn't know what to say. Finally, she replied she was going to think about

it. Meanwhile, she hung out with her friends, not approaching him or acknowledging his presence. The other boys seemed to watch him, analyzing him from a distance. They would then gather and talk, laugh, and make funny gestures he didn't feel comfortable with. But he patiently waited for her to come back with her answer. When she finally did, it was pure joy. The prettiest, sweetest, smartest girl in the school had said yes to him. She was his first girlfriend, and he was thrilled to show her his best.

When the time was right, he wanted to show her his house by the river. He had by now finished construction, and the place was fully functional. He had decided that it was time to move there permanently and leave the foster home behind. For all the friends he had back home, here he had been unable to make any friends other than that of the girl with the golden hair. It was sad, and he was beginning to feel like a failure in his mission to help the past become a better place. But again, he had to be strong and persevere.

One day an inspector came by his house. The construction had gotten his attention, and he stopped his vehicle to see what it was. The boy was at home that day, so he received the man proudly. When asked for papers of ownership, the boy said he had none, that he had found and claimed the land for his own. The inspector laughed so loudly he scared the boy, and with all reason. The man told him to vacate the property—leave the place or he would fine him and put him in jail for use and abuse of federal property. Federal property? What was that? From where he came from, water (the new land) belonged to everybody, and anybody had the right to claim a piece to build their house or community on stilts. They agreed he would leave and no further action would be taken. With nowhere to go, it was back to the foster home. Next day, when he went to his house to get the rest of his belongings, he found the house had been torn

down. A pile of trash lay by the river's edge where it once used to be. And so he went on to rebuild it, and the government came and tore it down again. It became a battle of endurance and power that at last the government won by fencing the area and prohibiting access to the river. He decided he had to move further out to the marshlands, where the fields of tall grasses protected from unwanted viewers and the marsh waters from intrusion.

It was tough to build a house in such a place, but he knew how to set foundations in unstable soil and construct a building with elements he could find discarded or given as gifts by nature. He spent long hours devoted to his new endeavor, and he finally achieved his mission. His new place was ready.

Quickly, he took his belongings from the foster home and stopped going there to sleep. Next thing he knew, the police were again questioning him, demanding he respond and return "home." The system was darn annoying, he thought—no freedom of thought, no liberty to choose one's possibilities in life. How could all live so restricted? No wonder everybody was so grumpy and jumpy.

He finally turned eighteen and was allowed to leave the foster care of the middle-aged woman. He could now care for his place and ask his girl to become his wife. That night, he couldn't sleep out of the excitement. All would work for him now.

He was allowed to become independent and provide for himself. Easier said than done. Now he had to really provide for himself. So he started a farm in the marshes, as it was done at home where there was no land left and one had to be creative. With his love for nature, respect for the environment, and sheer perseverance, he managed to survive. Oh was he happy! He had not eaten so well in months. Healthy, nourishing food lay on his table, freshly prepared for him to enjoy. He also started working as a waiter at a seafood restaurant,

acquiring some extra income to support himself and, as soon as he shared his feelings, his fiancée as well.

THE FEELINGS

When he was ready, he went back to his girlfriend to invite her home and show her all the good he could do. He found her a little offended though. He had abandoned her for weeks, she said, leaving her bored and frustrated with his lack of attention. She was angry and would not permit such selfish behavior. Either he was devoted to her or she was not his girlfriend anymore. He found it so refreshing, this outburst of self-defense, that he loved her all the more for it. He made it clear he would love her only and make her the center of his world. They both laughed and went to the café for some refreshments and a good talk.

He was so in love with her she truly became the center of his world. He never thought that loving somebody could be this way. His heart stopped every time he caught sight of her, he dreamed with her, everything he did he did for her, and he totally abandoned himself for the love of her. He was happy in this feeling though. He had always liked to feel useful, to help and give of himself to fulfill others' needs, to make others happy.

Although hesitant at the beginning, she began to care for him too. He was different from the other boys. With him she felt safe, cherished, respected, truly loved, and she could use him to her pleasure, too. She didn't know much of his past, his family, his history, but he seemed to always say the right thing, was always clean, was healthy, and got the best grades in his class. He was the smartest of all, but he wasn't a nerd; he didn't have to study because he knew it all, and he wasn't a slacker either. He was just different

and seemed to always have a positive attitude toward all. She liked that. She truly did.

The day he brought her to his place, they were both quite nervous—him for what she would think of his home, her for what might happen. By then, he had gotten himself a moped, so they traveled to the outskirts of the city, where the river met the sea, and entered the uncharted territories of the marshes. He had built a boardwalk to get there, winding through nature, a glimpse of beauty at every bend. It was lovely! The fresh breeze, the warm sun, the relaxed sound of water splashing against the stilts under the deck, all made for a symphony of perfection. He was thrilled, and she was content. At the door, they had their first kiss. Then they sat by the terrace and watched the sunset. He had prepared some refreshments and food from the latest harvest. She couldn't believe what he had done; it was a work of unprecedented creativity, of love and respect.

They decided he needed to be introduced to her parents. It was time he met them. They would be proud, she thought, that their daughter was dating somebody so smart and so caring. So it was planned that they would come for dinner. She would find out when Daddy had a free evening in his busy schedule, and they would make a visit.

THE CONFLICT

Several months passed until the daddy finally found some free time to devote to his daughter. The boy was growing impatient, but his always good spirit made him see others' intentions in a positive way, so he forgave and waited. Their relationship had not moved much further either. She was unenthusiastic about doing things together. She liked him being different, but he was making her miss the fun!

Her friends were going to parties, learning to drive. Some even had smoked, and some had gotten drunk. By the way they behaved when drinking, and by the way they looked after, the boy couldn't understand how that could be considered fun. But that was his humble opinion. Where he lived, alcoholic beverages were produced, sipped, and enjoyed, but getting totally under the influence wasn't seen as fun or enjoyable, rather a way to lose oneself, to forget something in their lives, and that was a rare thing.

Issues big and small were causing disruption in their relationship, and they began to argue a lot. For the boy, quarreling wasn't a common thing. His parents had never fought; all discussions were civilized and always ended in common agreement. But the girl was used to it, for her parents fought, yelled, and even threw objects at each other with no apparent remorse.

When her father announced he had a couple of hours free to meet that guy his daughter was dating, the boy was filled with joy. Meeting the family, having them see what he was capable of doing, would give everybody assurance that they were meant to be together.

The girl's mother, father, and little brother took the trip with boredom and a sense of obligation. "Let's go and get this over with," the mother had said, and so all embarked in their fancy car and drove to the outskirts of the city where the river meets the marshes. With horror, the mother realized they had to park and walk a few yards to get to their destination. A few steps into their journey, the father was frowning. He took his jacket off and was constantly wiping his forehead with his handkerchief. By the time they got to the house, he was furious! As the girl came out to greet them, the mother stopped a few feet before the door. She couldn't believe her eyes. Her daughter was dating a homeless person? Suddenly all turned into drama, with everybody yelling at the same time, furious for being there, for having

to waste their time on such a horror. How did she dare! Was that a joke, a bad joke for sure?

When the boy came out the door, they were all angry and sweaty. The girl was crying, the brother bored to death with this stupid trip to a place with no internet, the mother about to collapse, and the father in a rage that almost caused him a heart attack. The boy gently introduced himself and tried to calm the situation, but nobody listened to him, nobody even noticed him, nobody even cared he was there. When the father asked what the girl was thinking by bringing them here, she responded quietly that she wasn't sure. When the mother finally noticed the boy, she spoke such nasty words. She found the right adjectives to insult him to his core. "Me, a lady, in a place like this! We need to leave quickly, before anybody sees us and speaks of this shameful place." They demanded the girl leave with them, and on the ride back home, they barely spoke. The mother reminded them that nobody was to say a thing. This was just a bad dream that would soon be forgotten.

The boy was speechless. He couldn't understand what had happened and what could have caused these people to react the way they did. He had never seen anything like that before and was confused. Oh, if his parents would have been there! For the first time in his journey to the past, he felt lonely and scared.

The next day, back in school, he approached the girl and asked her what happened. They had all left so abruptly and were so angry. He needed to understand why. She looked at him with a face he didn't know she could have; it was angry and disgusted. She yelled at him to leave her alone and to never talk to her again. She wasn't his girlfriend anymore and didn't want to know or hear from him again. "Just go away! Disappear, you nasty, poor loser," she said and turned her back on him.

That night, he cried until he was sick. He was devastated, desolate, his heart broken. Could somebody explain to him what had happened?

Judging someone out of fear is a more common reaction than you think. When faced with diversity or the unknown, some react with rejection, cruelty, and denial. It is a sad thing to see and hear, for it causes damage to the offended but diminishes the offender as well. A life lived in fear, based on acceptance only of what is believed equal, is a life half-lived. By judging others, we limit ourselves in experiencing the full richness of this world and deprive ourselves the opportunity of growing and learning new things. Always live with an open heart, live with love. The boy understood this, but being rejected by the one he loved most was the most painful experience he had had in his life, and it began to change him.

THE SADNESS

He had been always a likable spirit, a positive soul, a happy character. He was always content by nature, and he found the good side to everything ... well, almost everything, until he was forced to live this ugly experience. He stopped going to school and missed his graduation. He wasn't eating anymore and stopped taking care of his garden. He didn't bother cleaning himself or his home. He was a total mess, depressed, and with no one to call for help. Sadness had absorbed his entire being. He roamed the marshes with no purpose and no will. He even lost interest in nature's beauty and all those great miracles Mother Earth is capable of giving us. He wasn't seeing anymore and just wanted to disappear.

One morning, in horror, he woke up to the realization his deadline to go back home had passed. Cold sweat ran down his back, and a

tremor in his hands made him incapable of focusing on anything. His mind was in panic. He was dead! In an irrational impulse, he ran from the house into the marshes and then jumped into the water. It was deep winter, and the water was cold as ice. The bottom felt mushy, and the grasses seemed to have become knives cutting his skin as he rushed past without paying attention. He was frantic, feverish, irrational, and so very scared. He let himself fall facedown in the water and made no effort to move. Soon air failed to fill his lungs, and water gently covered his whole being.

First a light, then darkness, then a voice calling him by his name. He opened his eyes and looked around, not recognizing where he was. An old woman with white hair and a sweet face was kneeling by his side. She smelled like lavender and lemongrass, and the whole room felt warm and inviting with a golden light. She knew his name. He must be dead, the boy thought. But the sweet old woman made him sit down, and when he looked around, he realized he was alive and still in the past.

She was native to the land and had lived her whole life in accordance with Mother Nature's teachings. She could talk to the owls, dance with the snakes, and laugh with the dolphins. She had a clear mind that saw and understood beyond the senses. She was a clairvoyant, a healer, one of a few advanced souls that had chosen to come and enlighten the path and prepare for a better future. She knew of him; she had seen him in her dreams. When she sensed he was in danger, she began the quest to find him and help him out of his misery. She had walked for miles, for days to find him, and once she did, she had brought him to her house. And now she would help him to gain his strength back. She knew he was alone in these times and that he had lost his purpose and was scared. She knew the value of a warm heart, of friendship and family.

STOP AND LET'S HAVE A LITTLE TALK

What do you see here? How do you feel about the time traveler's situation? Do you think he's right in reacting the way he has? What about the girl and her family? Did they have the right to treat him the way they did? Why do you think they reacted that way? What would you do in circumstances where you feel treated unfairly? How would you help somebody you see is being mistreated?

Yes, this story is a metaphor for social, cultural, racial, or religious discrimination. It is a sad custom our society has embraced out of fear of what being different might mean. This has made us separate, judgmental, and sometimes wrongly selective. We mix and match with those who think and see the world in the same tones as we do. Nothing wrong with that, as long as we don't push others aside, offend them, or do them harm because we are afraid of what they could bring to our lives.

Perception is a construct of our own device, not truth or reality. What we see is what we have built for ourselves, to understand the complexity of what surrounds us and that which we cannot explain. Open your eyes, look around, be here, be now, feel your body, sense your feelings, and understand what surrounds you, where you are, and what you have. Be grateful, embrace the world around you, have faith, and open your heart. Being different is not a sin. If you open your heart, you will be able to see diversity as a blessing and a vehicle of growth. Never judge somebody for his or her looks, beliefs, color of skin, or social status. After all, we are all one in our diverse humanity.

The time traveler has been forced to live in a society different from his. Despite his enthusiasm, due to circumstances, he lost his way and became discouraged and depressed, feeling abandoned and with no purpose.

As we are all connected as one force in an energetic embrace, our actions affect others as theirs affect us. If you feel a victim of discrimination, overcome your fear and stand up for your truth. If you are afraid of those who are different, look closer at them and open your heart. We are all love and lovable and therefore deserve respect, space, and dignity to live the lives we have chosen for ourselves.

Sometimes we face unwanted situations that put us at risk. What would you do in the case of the time traveler? How would you help him? If you feel you are in a situation like his, how will you come back to life? Do you have advice for a person that has lost purpose? Sometimes just a good, open heart can move mountains. Never judge. Forgive and let go. Life is beautiful, and we are all loved. Always remember that.

Now let's take a look at how this story unfolds ...

THE DIVINE GUIDANCE

When the boy was fully awake, he started crying so desperately it broke the old woman's heart. Quickly she reassured him he was not alone, that he was safe and had to have faith. She said, "Look around, boy. Do you see them?" She smiled as he looked around with a puzzled face. We live so much outside ourselves that we stop listening to our higher good, to the point that we don't see or hear anything that might come from another realm. It's normal, don't worry, but it can be changed as we move to higher, lighter frequencies and, with faith and an open heart, start looking inside our souls.

The old woman lovingly told the boy, "Don't cry, my gentle one. You have lost faith, but that can be restored. Don't get desperate when you don't see the light behind the clouds; instead have faith. Close your eyes, dream and desire, then detach yourself from the outcome

and give it all to the divine. You'll see how serendipitous it is when that what you wish comes true. But don't forget this: always do it from a place of love and gratefulness. You'll see, my boy, you'll see."

With care and love, she taught him the beauty and the magic of meditation. They sat for hours practicing how to breathe, to still the mind, to get to one's own sanctuary and pray. Slowly the boy began feeling more confident, and his health improved, as did his mood. He started practicing on his own, and as he did, he prayed for the best outcome to his situation and for the highest good of all.

Every night beside his bed was one of the light beings that had come to rescue him. She had been by him since the old woman had brought him to her place. At first he couldn't see her or feel her, but as time passed and he learned how to pray, meditate, and listen to the divine, he started feeling her warmth. One night, as he felt thankful and relaxed, he felt a soothing warmth on his left arm. Another time he felt a tingling touch, then a soothing so comforting he thought his mother was embracing him. And then, one night as he was praying for help, he saw her at the foot of his bed.

Her name is Berenice, a martyr in Roman times who had drowned trying to escape an abusive situation. She could fully understand his suffering and had come to give him support and guide him to trust himself, regain strength, and find his purpose again. When the old woman learned of this encounter, she rejoiced. She explained to him that there were other light beings, like Berenice, there to guide him but that these beings respected free will and therefore only intervened when they were asked and allowed for. She kissed him on the forehead and thanked him for his mission to the past. His presence was another sign of her purpose in life, as she and others were helping prepare the future for those who would make it a better place. She reassured him that he had a purpose, too, and for that reason he was here

experiencing all that had happened to him, so he could then help others to follow their soul's call.

THE SOUL'S CALL

The soul, such a complex thing, apparently so secret and remote and yet so sweet and simple if we let our mind hear its loving whisper, feel its warm embrace.

As the time traveler started gaining control of his life again, he started remembering his dreams and aspirations. Berenice was always by his side, giving him advice or consolation. As he listened to her, he realized he once had profound dreams and strong goals—that he would set out to help others, to share his knowledge and his love. It had always given him a sense of hope and total fulfillment. As the old woman and now Berenice kept telling him, all truth was within himself.

Yes! He wanted to help. He wanted to advocate for change and be of use. It was the purpose of his mission! What had happened? How could he forget his dreams? Well, as we go through tough times, we sometimes grieve, filled with attachment to something we thought was ours. The universe has such magical and unexpected ways to shake our ground, call our attention, and show us what is truly best for us. Chaos and difficulties are the perfect catalyst for growth and change. Always keep the lesson, wrap it in positive thoughts, let go of the negative, forgive yourself of any regret or feeling of victimhood, and move on. The time traveler was beginning to understand this.

As spring approached, he was feeling more motivated to start new projects around the house, fixing this, finishing that. Slowly he was recovering his true self and feeling his heart expand, at peace and in love.

THE LIBERATION

His life came to a point where he understood that not all he had lived and learned in this past world was of use or importance; there was so much to throw away and relearn. Being liked by everyone wasn't important anymore. Being the center of attention wasn't needed either. And being the savior of everyone he met was no longer his motto. He understood that his true calling was to embrace pure and universal love so he could truly be of help to himself and others.

The day he realized this and let go of his false, ego-driven desires, he felt light as a feather. All apparent problems, all fears faded as if by magic. When he looked at Berenice, she was smiling at him with reassuring energy. The sun was shining, and the crops were starting to bear fruit. The old woman was training him in therapeutic healing lessons and preparing him as a shaman. As his soul awakened and he let go of his baggage, his learning was fast and natural. He was having such a good time learning about the healing power of plants and seeds and all that is natural. He was learning the value of meditation, to ground himself and gain strength and insight from the higher spirits. He was learning the meaning of respect for nature and all its gifts, the power of holistic medicine and the love it takes to heal. He had almost forgotten about his community back home. This was all there was now.

His shamanic powers spread through the wind like magic seeds, and people started flocking to where he had built his hut and was practicing his natural medicine. So many came, so many he gave consolation and help to. He was happy, fulfilled, content, and people were grateful for his service and for the hope and light he brought to their lives.

One night as he was finishing his day after he had seen his last

patient, the old woman came to him. When she looked at him, there was so much love in her eyes! She said to him, "Good-bye, my boy. You have made it." When the boy asked her where she was going, she smiled and said she wasn't going anywhere. Then she turned and walked to her house, where a warm fire was always burning. The boy, exhausted from the day, didn't give this strange moment another thought and went to bed.

As he woke up the next morning, the sound of waves called his attention. He thought the marshes might be suffering a flood and quickly sat up in his bed ... but ... he wasn't in his bed! He wasn't even in his hut in the marshes. He knew where he was, though; he recognized the place. But how could this have happened? Then he saw her, Berenice. She was standing in a corner with her sweet, loving face, looking at him, wanting to reassure him in his realization. Then they both started laughing, and Berenice faded out until the next time he might need her presence.

He had just woken up in his bed, in his room at his parents' house. He had just woken up in his present time. Yes, he was back for goodness sake! His love, his resilience, his gratitude had brought him home where he belonged and where he could continue fulfilling his dream by giving a hand to all who asked for it.

A WORD

Love moves mountains, so true! As the time traveler found certainty in his actions and thoughts, he started believing in himself. His heart opened, and he could forgive himself and others for their actions. Forgiveness, gratitude, and unconditional love put us in higher vibrations that attract more of the good things we want for our lives. If we remain in fear, in anger, and in pain, we are

victimizing ourselves and blocking the great potential we are capable of. Always focus on the positive, even if you feel you're walking in the dark. There is a helpful lesson behind every step we take. Just pay attention, be aware, and relate to yourself, the divine, and the world that surrounds you.

If we face reality with faith, we can achieve greater results and feel more fulfilled, happier, and hopeful for all life brings us. You see, we cannot control the outcome of all things; the universe has a way of showing us that life is sometimes different from what we want it to be. When we hold high expectations, without a flexible mind-set, we might become disappointed and hurt. In all aspects of life, learning to let go of the outcome of a situation can help us be better prepared to embrace larger, more fulfilling opportunities that come along.

Believe in yourself, stand your ground, have faith, and let go of the outcome of any situation. You'll see that it's easier to move forward without getting hurt, disappointed, or frustrated. With an open heart and a positive attitude, serendipitous things happen. Be surprised, be grateful, be happy.



The Mermaid Boy

THE BASE OF IT ALL

He was the most beautiful boy anyone had ever seen. Olive skin, silky black hair, and stunning green eyes that looked at you through the purest of souls. His parents had started their lives together at a not-so-young age. Dad had trouble committing, and Mom had difficulties conceiving, so when the boy finally came along, their marriage was already fading. For Mom, he became the world, and she even abandoned herself for her little prince. For Dad, he was a small disruption to his freedom, but still he hoped that through his son he would perpetrate his kind in the world. As Mom went on to gain weight, Dad went on to explore the pleasures of life. Mom's attention was directed solely toward her son, and through dreams and aspirations for herself, she knew that one day her little boy would save her from this life, and all was going to be so nice! Dad just wanted the boy to be a tough dude, a macho man who drank beer, laughed loudly, and had all the women he wanted.

Dad liked hunting, so when the boy was old enough to walk on his own, Dad took him stalking and proudly introduced his son to the world of killing other creatures. Every trip was the same, a mix

of anger, hesitation, fear, disgust, and pain, and every time the boy cried disconsolate tears. Of course, with the boy's every cry, every creature ran for safety, and Dad couldn't catch a thing. Frustration filled his veins, until one day Dad loaded the back of his truck, left the house, and was never seen again.

Mom grew bigger and older, as if by magic, but took on the responsibility of providing for her prince to give him the best education she could. She worked two jobs, cleaned, cooked, and mended things, always busy, occupied by chores that would take her away from living.

The boy grew lonely and quiet, feeling different, feeling disconnected, a stranger in his own skin.

THE FEELINGS

Life had been strange for him. All events, all happenings seemed to have been written for another person. It was hard for him to fit in, to feel part of the group, especially considering he didn't even feel he belonged in his body.

He was drop-dead handsome and turned heads as he passed by, but that had never seemed to get to him. Any flirtatious compliment directed toward him he felt wasn't real, wasn't meant for him. Everybody fell for his good looks, but it always seemed so fake for him, so much based on a lie, an inexistent truth, an empty image.

THE ENVIRONMENT

He loved summer, though. Oh, how would he love for it to never end. The only time he felt in his element was during those lazy, warm summers when he and Mom spent their holidays at Auntie's cottage

by the beach. Was that lovely! He could go swimming and spend hours under water, exploring the beautiful marine life.

The first time his mom brought him to the sea, his heart just couldn't be contained in his chest. He had not seen the ocean before, but somehow, he knew perfectly what it was. As he touched the sand, he felt a strange sensation and started running toward the water, Mom running behind him in a desperate attempt to catch him. She tripped and fell, but he continued running to the water until it touched his skin. Something precious filled his heart at that moment. He kept going until the water covered him completely, and he started swimming under water! He had never swum before, but he knew how. He didn't have the need to breathe, so he kept diving deeper, in awe of all that his eyes could see. When he returned to the surface and got out of the water, there was a huge commotion on the beach. Lifeguards, paramedics, curious people crowded the beach in such disorder that it made him feel violated in his intimacy and peace. Mom was being treated by some paramedics, as she seemed to have suffered a breakdown and was bitterly crying for her boy. "Mom," he said, "why are you crying?" When she saw him, she fell to her knees and kissed him so hard he felt he was going to run out of breath and die.

After this incident, it became hard for him to go freely into the water. Mom was always around, ready to grab him and take him to safety. Any time he could sneak out and go for a swim, he made the minutes count and enjoyed every bit of it.

Most of his childhood he spent away from the sea, always dreaming of it, longing to be close. When money was tight and Mom was going through a rough time, Auntie offered for them to temporarily stay at the cottage by the beach. Mom could work as a maid at a resort nearby, and the boy could join his cousins at the

little school by the beach. He was thrilled with the idea, a chance to enjoy the beach he so much loved! So, one cold winter day, they moved to the cottage by the beach. It was only then that his true discovery started.

THE DISCOVERY

How much he wanted to just be there in the water. It didn't matter if it was warm or cold; he felt calm and that he belonged in that element. He had arguments with Mom for that reason. She was always afraid he would catch a terrible cold or even drown.

As a little boy, he had always felt different from the rest. He had barely a friend, and for the way he behaved, absent and distracted, he seemed to be the ridicule of all. His beauty didn't help either, for some envious characters made that their weapon to bully him. They called him names and laughed at him. But that didn't even come close to what he felt about himself.

A strange call brought him to the sea, an urge that sometimes felt like desperation. As he was young, he couldn't understand what was going on with him. He just had that deep knowing that he wasn't part of what he was supposed to be. He didn't have any interest in boys' toys or games. He wasn't even interested in boys or girls. He just felt that urgent pull toward the sea and couldn't understand why. As a young boy, he tried to suppress those feelings, but as he grew older, they started consuming him to the point he became depressed. Mom took him to see a doctor, but there was nothing wrong with him, the doctor said; all seemed normal and well.

When he found time alone, he always went to the sea and spent long hours there, walking on the shore, swimming and diving. One day as he submerged in the deep-sea waters, he heard a voice calling

him, beautiful and reassuring. It almost sounded like his own voice, but it couldn't be, he thought. This voice was so warm and clear. He followed his instinct and kept going deeper into the sea. A dolphin came to greet him and welcomed him with such sweet happiness he had never felt before. For some reason, he could understand what the dolphin was saying. He was stunned by his ability to communicate with this beautiful being. The dolphin guided him to what seemed a coral formation, and as they came closer, the boy swore he could see the shape of a castle. As they swam into this colorful coral formation, it truly seemed that there were rooms, furnished and beautifully decorated. Suddenly, the dolphin stopped and pointed to a large wall where seashells and other creatures made their home. The dolphin laughed and said, "She has been waiting for you ... the queen," and then gave the boy a bow and left.

The boy was there, floating in deep waters, not knowing, not understanding, until suddenly the big wall started to reveal its treasures. In front of him was the most beautiful mermaid he never even dreamed of seeing. She kindly smiled at him and opened her arms in a warm, welcoming gesture. The mermaids of her court started showing themselves too, and the whole wall acquired the most stunning jewel-like appearance. It looked like a cathedral decorated with magical treasures. The boy couldn't believe what he was seeing, what he was experiencing, but he was there and pretty much awake and alive—that he knew.

The mermaid queen again welcomed him and asked him to come closer. He was so confused he couldn't even ask her what this was, what he was doing there. How could it be? But she knew. With a voice that sounded like a song, she told him the story of a seed that traveled the seas, the earth, and the skies in search of a pure soul that could give it life. The seed had landed in him as his parents conceived

him. He was then part man, part mermaid and therefore belonged to both worlds. He was to be a beacon of light to create awareness of the differences and similarities of their worlds.

The boy suddenly felt out of breath, and all in front of him disappeared. The dolphin quickly came to his rescue and brought him back to shore. "Be calm, mermaid boy. All is true, and you will be well. Be safe," he said and swam back to the ocean.

The boy sat by the shore until the sun went down. His heart was pounding in his chest like it wanted to run away. What had he just experienced? Mixed sensations ran through his body. He felt calm yet agitated, content yet so nervous, reassured in his being yet scared. He looked at his arms, his legs. He seemed like a boy, but now so deep inside him, he knew he was truly different; he was a mermaid boy. A little smile drew itself in his face, and he felt better as he walked back to the cottage.

THE CONFLICT

The next day he went to school, returning to the cruel reality he lived every day, but now it was even harder, as he knew he was truly different. As he grew in understanding, his attitude toward life and the people around him changed. He felt surer of himself and therefore more calm and ready to voice his beliefs and his reality.

As he became a voice for diversity, social reality hit him hard. Where there was mockery, he now found rejection, fear, and even violence. Many times he got into fights. Many times Mom was called to the principal's office. Many times he was punished and had to spend extra hours at school in detention. He was now even lonelier. Mom couldn't believe what she was hearing! She was disappointed, disgusted (her own words). How could it be that her own boy, her

prince and savior, could be saying those atrocities about himself and putting him, her, their name, their integrity at such risk to vulnerability and rejection? She was angry and, as was her way, turned her pain into work and turned her back to her son, hoping that ignoring the facts would make them disappear.

As the mermaid boy was becoming more certain about who he was and feeling more secure about how he felt, the world around him, as he knew it, was closing on him. It takes courage to voice one's beliefs, especially if they're so different from what society dictates. People will react with fear and rejection, will close doors and stop listening if their set of constructed beliefs is threatened. Whatever your truth is, whatever there is you feel you need to fight for that comes from a place of love, stand your ground, defend your view with love and respect, for as you want to be heard, others want to be, too.

THE NONACCEPTANCE

As the mermaid boy grew into a young man, he could feel the changes occur in his body, not like other young men, though. For him, change was happening differently. The more his body grew into full maturity, the stronger his desire to dive to the mermaids' castle, spend time with them, learn from them, and be with them, for he always found a warm welcome and a festive mood. He felt he belonged. He felt comfortable and could easily share his feelings with them. The problem was that when returning to the life he was supposed to be living, all his ghosts came to visit, and all his fears came to life.

In his surroundings, there was no one he could talk to, no one to share his reality with, no one to ask for advice and guidance, no support. Teachers were so concerned about having him around the

“normal” kids some had even refused to have him in their classroom. Parents had called for the school board to act against having a “weird thing” amongst their children. He had to attend private lessons to complete his schooling and move forward. He had no friends, and even his cousins had stopped inviting him to hang out with them. When he was asked to share his reality, he felt analyzed, scrutinized, as if he were a specimen in a laboratory. He even had trouble using the restrooms, for there was always somebody who would feel threatened by his presence. Couldn’t they see? He had no intention or interest whatsoever to cause anyone harm or discomfort. He just wanted to belong and be accepted for who he was.

More and more he was spending time at the mermaids’ castle, and as he did so, his body continued to change. If once he questioned who he was and why he felt such a stranger in his body, now he understood who he really was and why he had once felt that way. This knowing made him feel true to his core, secure in his reality, deeply grateful, empowered and courageous. Now he truly wanted to embrace the mermaid life and carry it as his emblem.

THE DISCRIMINATION

He started a blog for discussion where he could share his experience and where others could give their opinion. Maybe there was another mermaid boy or girl in town he could get in touch with and unite forces. But no one voiced his or her similarities with him; he only found indifference and rejection. Some comments posted were even filled with hatred and violence. Although his intention was to create a platform for awareness and understanding, he was becoming too reactionary, too defensive, and people reacted to his words accordingly. But he persisted, for he wanted to create a response to his reality and

that of the mermaids. Unfortunately, there are things one can share and others one must keep to oneself. As he spoke of the mermaids, there was a movement growing to refute the mermaids' existence. People were becoming aggressive and vicious, with no respect for truth or personal choices.

Have you ever felt that somebody is following you? Have you ever felt all eyes on you and not really for the best and most flattering of intentions? Well, that's how he was feeling now. After a life of being ignored and pushed aside, he was suddenly the center of attention of many that couldn't understand and accept his circumstances.

As he had chosen honesty toward himself and the world, and had decided to be the being he truly was, his skin started changing. One could see rays of blue, silver, and gold at the back of his neck where his skin was becoming like that of a sea creature. His hands were changing too, becoming better equipped for sea life, for swimming and holding onto diverse marine surfaces. His changes were celebrated at the mermaid castle and punished with horror in the beach village. Even as he felt stronger and reassured in his decision by the deep knowledge that now he was being himself, he still felt the pain of not being recognized and accepted for what he was. Where before he battled with himself, now his fight was with the world. How much he would have given for his mom to be by his side and go through this journey with him. But the whole town was standing in fear, revulsion, and nonacceptance.

His presence generated such negative reactions in many that as he became more of a known figure in town, violent acts against him, his privacy, and his property started happening. He was spending more time at the mermaid castle to find support and reassurance, but the mermaid queen was always clear in telling him to shine his light and spread the good feeling that knowledge, acceptance, and respect can

bring. So he always came back to the village to talk and be the voice for their rights.

One early morning as he walked to the beach, he saw great commotion at the village's pier. Boats were getting ready to go on a hunt. His heart started pounding, and fear ran up his spine. The boats with their crew roared in angry symphony. As he approached the site, they were leaving at high speed toward deep waters, the mermaids' realm. The mermaid boy quickly jumped into the water and swam as fast as he could, hoping to get to the mermaids' castle before the angry crowd. The dolphin had seen the turmoil and had gone ahead to tell them to run for safety. So when divers armed with harpoons arrived to the place, there was nothing to see or sense that could tell of the mermaids' presence or of their existence. The boy was so relieved to learn of this, he went back home and slept for two days.

THE REALIZATION

Reality turned quite ugly and harsh for him. He could go nowhere without being insulted, beaten, or even thrown out. His presence caused trouble to people who couldn't understand difference and distinguish right from wrong. Fear-based thoughts are destructive and not conducive to a solution, but they exist, and one needs to learn how to cope with and work around them, always with a loving and grateful mind-set. Please know this: destruction brought on by fear only brings more of the same and ends up destroying those who hold to such ugly feelings.

The news came of the killing of a whole mermaid colony close to a village further north, and a mermaid had been abducted and was now being shown as an oddity at another village plaza. A ban

on mermaids was put in place, and every sighting of one of those creatures had to be denounced.

The mermaid boy was so afraid. He had been a loud spokesperson for the mermaid group and probably would be recognized by many. His life was at risk.

The night of the mermaid killings, his mom came home pale and distressed. When she saw her son, a sign of relief brightened her face. She sat by him and cried. Her heart hurt. She was so sorry for having left him alone to his reality and not being there to support and help him through such complex and difficult times in his life. But she was there now, and that mattered most to him. Sometimes difficulties and downturns make us realize and value what there is around us. She had come to realize that the love for her son was larger and deeper than any social convictions or anything said to control and subdue people. Her son was different, she was his mom, and that was all that should matter. She would stand by him and help him. Both cried in a sweet embrace.

Have you felt that deep feeling of relief and reassurance once you have seen something clearly? Ah, it felt like all difficulties, all dramas, all that was happening outside their lives could not hurt them anymore. They were now united, stronger in their truth.

Unfortunately, things were becoming ugly around the village. Narrow-minded people had created such strong opposition to any possible acceptance of difference and diversity that hate had spread throughout the community, dividing it, splitting it apart. Anybody of background, race, or beliefs different from that of the majority was being forced to leave town. With families destroyed and friendships betrayed, pain and distrust ruled the days.

Auntie came to see them one night, begging them to leave, too. It was for the best of all, she said, for her children were finding no

peace. They packed their belongings and left in the middle of a moonless night. They would drive until sunrise, put distance between the beach village and their lives, and go from there.

THE NEGATION

The mermaid boy was sad and disappointed. Sad for leaving behind the mermaids without knowing of their well-being, and disappointed for not having been able to convey his message and make people understand that he, they, were not a threat but a true source of enlightenment and progress. Of course, those who opposed him saw it differently, as they were too afraid that their own wounds and dark spots would come to the surface and shock people, making them objects of ridicule. What a shame!

Before leaving, he took his last dive. He wanted to see if he could leave the mermaids a message and find out how they were doing. A sea turtle came to give him courage, and even the white shark that had always been so inattentive wished him well, but the dolphin was nowhere to be found. The boy began to panic. Could it be the queen's colony that was destroyed by the villagers? But a crab roaming the sea bottom told him he would find the dolphin at the sea cliff where the whales gathered during fall. The whales welcomed him with happy relief to see him well and guided him to the dolphin, who was recovering from wounds.

As the boy saw him, his heart broke. He had been harpooned and now was fighting for his life. He assured the boy he would survive, for his mission on this planet was only half-done. He told the boy the mermaids were safe; that they had fled to safer seas where their presence was appreciated. Then he gave the boy distressing advice before sending him back to the surface. He said, "Go, heal, find

your ground, find your truth, become strong, and don't look back. Remain silent about your reality until the right ones come to help you. You will know when the time is right to act again and let the world know who you are. Be safe, my boy, be strong, be wise. Now go." The dolphin closed his eyes as a nurse shark came to assist him.

When the boy came back to the cottage, Mom was anxiously waiting for him. "What did you find out?" she asked.

He said, "They are all well, but we must go now and not look back until all is healed and forgotten."

LET'S TAKE A BREAK

How do you see this story? What's the way out, do you think? Write it down. Have an opinion.

Discrimination, judgment, and lack of understanding have many shades. Opposing forces will always hold the other side wrong. How you stand when confronted with adverse situations is what truly matters. What does your heart say? Is what you see, hear, know, or learn for the highest good of all? As in everything in life, always look at your possibilities from the point of view of love, respect, and gratefulness toward yourself and all that surrounds you. Think on how you like to be treated and do the same with others.

Our mermaid boy has gone through very difficult experiences throughout his young life. He has fought with his feelings, his image, and self-esteem. He has stood up for his beliefs and has found his truth, always with a kind heart. A brave boy he is! Brave because despite his biology, his dual reality, he has faced it always with complete honesty and love, never blaming others for his luck but keeping a positive attitude toward the challenges life gave him to live.

Always be brave, be honest, be grateful for what you have and who you are, and you will go far.

THE OPPORTUNITY

They drove in the direction of the mountains. Hours passed, and they still seemed to be so far away, the mountains like teasers playing with their strength and patience. At dawn they were finally climbing a hill. Suddenly, after a sharp curve, Mom had to push hard on the brakes. A woman was standing in middle of the road and seemed not to have any intention of moving. Frozen from the impression, they looked out at the woman on the road. She didn't look ordinary and seemed to have a glow around her. Her white dress was long, and a light blue shawl covered her partially ... was she standing on a half moon? The woman opened her shawl and showed them her heart shining bright in her chest, sending rays of love toward them. Mom whispered in awe, "It's Mother Mary!"

Mother Mary, who is *the* mother of all, who assists all children in need, who has no denomination, who has a heart as big as the whole earth, had come to help them find their way. Without speaking, she sent her thoughts in a voice that was soft, warm, and clear.

She pointed to a winding road some distance away and told them to take it until they found shelter. Mom replied that was private property and they would be trespassing. Mother Mary reassured them that it was safe and they would find the help needed to rest and replenish their energy.

They drove for a long distance until they crossed a gate. Green pastures on both sides, animals roaming peacefully, and a soft breeze playing with the trees gave the whole scene a sense of calm timelessness. The mermaid boy felt a positive feeling in his heart,

although he was very tired and in need of water to splash and wet his skin. As he was transitioning to his new self, some needs had changed, and he was still adapting to this new form, understanding what it was to be truly a mermaid, understanding how it felt to be himself.

As they approached a housing compound, they saw three people coming out to greet them. They smiled and welcomed them. "We were expecting you," the woman said. "Please take the car to that structure so it'll sit in the shade," the man said. When they all gathered in what seemed like a courtyard, with a well in the center adorned with flowers, they finally shook hands and introduced themselves. "This is our daughter," the woman said. "She is special, like your boy. She has the precious qualities of a lynx; she can hear and see for long distances."

"She told us you were coming," the man said. They both seemed so proud of their daughter, and one could sense the love they felt for the girl.

The lynx girl was beautiful, her colors golden and her eyes liquid green. They were like those of the mermaid boy, pure eyes that spoke from the soul. The girl then came forward and asked them if they had seen the lady on the road. Mom affirmed with a nod of her head, not knowing if she was giving the right answer. The girl smiled and told them that Mother Mary was her friend, her guide, her ascendant master. They had met in the higher mountains when she was looking for herself, and Mother Mary had come to give her comfort and advice. Since then, prayer and gratefulness for all that is was her daily routine. She looked at the boy and said, with a calm, smooth voice that sounded like a cat, that Mother Mary and she were going to help him find his way, his voice, his faith, so that everybody would accept his reality with calm and peace.

Later at dinner, when they were sitting around the family table, Mom asked them how they managed to live in harmony with their neighbors and all the kids at school. The woman responded that it had not been an easy task, but with faith, with forgiveness, and with love all was possible. They would see; it would soon be the same for them, too. They planned for the kids to go on an outing the next day. The lynx girl would share her experience, and they hoped Mother Mary would show herself and give them some advice.

Next morning, the girl and the boy got ready for their first journey to the higher mountains. They would spend some days camping by the upper lake, meditating and learning from each other. When they found balance and their energies were aligned, they would pray for Mother Mary to come and give them further guidance. The mermaid boy was surprised to learn of the closeness of Mother Mary to the lynx girl.

As they walked, the girl explained that it had taken her a long time to understand, to forgive, and to learn to listen. Once her heart was filled with gratitude and she had no expectations of any outcome was when Mother Mary had appeared to her. Since the energy around her had been so pure, so gentle, and so loving, it was easy for Mother Mary to show herself and be seen by her and her family. Some of the community had already heard of it, and it was common to see people going in procession to the well to leave flowers and thank-you notes. The boy asked how she got such acceptance from the community, and the girl looked at him and simply said, "Because of love."

They walked in silence for a while. The boy felt the sun on his skin and became dehydrated. The girl poured water on him and told him the lake was close by and he could soon rest and find relief. True, the lake was not saltwater, but at least it would help him keep his skin moist and healthy.

They built their campsite together and started a bonfire. They sat there warming up from the cool mountain weather and shared stories from their personal experiences of being different from the rest. For the girl, the journey had been much smoother. She had always counted on the strong support of her parents, and because of the love and union between them, it was much easier then to share and gain acceptance from the community.

THE ACCEPTANCE

It was easier, she said, when things came from a place of calm and shared understanding. Her parents had been an important part in the process, for all could see their acceptance and profound love for their daughter. Their faith had helped, too, which resulted in the appearance of Mother Mary and the spreading of good, positive energy throughout the whole mountain community.

The boy said he had been a voice of truth but had not been received well. The girl replied that she thought he had become too harsh, pushing people and making them nervous. She understood where he came from. He didn't have to defend himself, but he had to learn how to convey his message so that it became the voice of accord.

They sat in silence and began their meditation. The girl noticed he had a hard time focusing and letting his mind go. So she decided to start from the beginning and teach him to meditate. They practiced for two whole days! Impatience grew in the boy's throat, and he needed to constantly jump into the water. On the third day, things seemed to start working better. They put together a nice breakfast, the girl swam for a while, the boy just soaked in the fresh water, and then they started their routine. They did some breathing exercises

and some yoga stretching, and then when they felt calm, they started their meditation.

Breathing in, breathing out ... with each breath, the energy seemed to whirl up and down, energizing each chakra, awakening the mermaid boy inside. His eyes were closed, his mind in silence until rays of light illuminated the inside of his eyes. They were strong indigo, white, and purple rays that came from above. A feeling of wholeness and comfort surrounded him. He couldn't see, but he felt his body was glowing, surrounded by a halo of golden particles shimmering in the sunlight. Suddenly a door opened, and he entered a place where he could hear celestial music and see light beings pass by in effortless movement. There was a lake there, too, and at the center, Mother Mary was floating over it, surrounded by the purest of white lights. She opened her shawl, and a ray of golden green light hit the boy's forehead. He could hear her singing, and he could feel her love. Then a bird sang, and he was back in the mountains.

Seven days they spent there, camping, sharing thoughts, and meditating. Each day the boy felt he was a step ahead in his quest for true universal love. The seventh day, they were sitting by the fire close to the lake when Mother Mary made her appearance again. She said without saying that she had come with a message. The boy would have three challenges, and once accomplished, he would see the world differently, and the world would see him with other eyes.

The first challenge was to walk into a storm and allow everything that no longer served him to be blown away, with no attachment, no anticipated outcome. The second challenge was to walk to the garden of desires, choose the seeds of what he wanted his life to be, and then plant them, water them, and see them grow, again with no anticipation or attachment. The third challenge was to then ground himself, connect his roots to that of Mother Earth and his

branches to those of the celestial heaven. He would not be able to move forward if one of the challenges was not properly accomplished, his intentions clear and his heart pure. This said, Mother Mary faded into the night.

THE CALL

The storm was the hardest of all challenges, for he had to let go of all those constructed beliefs that had configured his life until now. He told the girl he had to do this alone and stayed by the lake confronting his ghosts. When the rain came and the storm started hitting, he felt fear, he felt anger and pity, he felt confusion and disappointment, and he felt some things fall out of his bag and tried desperately to get them back in. He fought hard, until there was a moment when the storm just kept washing everything away, destroying everything. He stopped his fight and realized nothing of it was worth saving. He was in one piece in his own skin, in his naked truth, and that's what mattered.

Suddenly the wind gave up, and black clouds gave way to smoother, cotton-like clouds. A picket fence appeared, and a gate opened. He went in and found himself in a barren garden, where the flowerbeds had been laid out but not planted yet. On a shelf, dreams hoping to come true were organized alphabetically. He carefully went to choose his. But wait! What was it he truly wanted? He spent a long time figuring out his true intentions. Sometimes he chose a seed for an outcome, and it immediately disintegrated. As he learned to let go of the results he wanted and asked the universe to guide him to what was best for his purpose, seeds seemed to be more responsive and alive, and so he went on collecting, planting, and nurturing his plantation of dreams.

Suddenly he felt a strong light at his back, and as he turned, a winding road opened in the fields, illuminated and leading him to a tree and a rock. He sat down on the ground by them, gave thanks for the journey so far, and began feeling his connection to Mother Earth and all her gifts. A deep feeling of gratitude filled his heart, and he forgave all those who had hurt him and sent them rays of love. As he was doing so, roots started growing from his spine into the earth, deep into the ground and far into the landscape until he touched the ocean. Branches of silver light were growing from his crown chakra up to the sky, passing the clouds to the stars. Like fingers, they touched the stars, and the energy was shared down to his heart and through him to the earth. The earth reciprocated, and a vortex of love bound him to heaven and earth.

As he was done with his challenges, Mother Mary sent him to create his network of similar-minded people to help him with his mission of love and awareness. "Be careful," she said. "Don't fall into outside drama and don't forget your roots. Focus on your true purpose." He nodded and prayed for himself and everybody involved in this enterprise called life.

THE POWER OF SELF

Slowly he walked down the mountain to the farm where everybody was waiting for him. "So how did it go?" they all asked at once. He immediately started building a plan with everyone's input and advice. People were stopping by with praise and advice for the lynx girl and the mermaid boy. A whole atmosphere of cordial collaboration spread from the mountains through the valleys all the way to the coast. You see, when you work from a heart of love and respect, not only toward yourself but toward others as well, people open up and have a better

disposition to listen and understand your point of view. Some may agree, some not, but there will always be a sense of respect, with boundaries that cannot be broken.

Once he discovered his truth, he felt reassured of his identity and wanted to spread the knowledge of his reality. He soon became a little stiff and reactionary. His audience couldn't resonate with him because they couldn't see his true point; they just perceived an image but not the content. Now, with Mother Mary's guidance, he knew he had to speak to the heart of people, even touch their fears and expectations, with kindness, respect, and empathy. He had to put himself in the situation of others and, through their example, find common ground to his reality and so calmly state his message.

THE UNIVERSAL LOVE

He was doing an amazing job, first creating a network of likeminded souls, then spreading the voice of love and respect. He was amazed how strong and decisive he could be, but most of all, he was the star of Mom's high spirits, power, and commitment. She had always been a woman who had put herself second, avoided conflict, suffered for her circumstances, and neglected herself in life. Now she was thriving. She had such influence on people. Her voice was strong and sweet, and she talked with conviction, with authority and confidence. Her wishes came true! Remember she wanted her prince to save her from the life she was having? Well, there you go. He did it. Involuntarily, he had put her at the crossroads, where she was forced to decide, change her old patterns and change her life. She couldn't have done it better. She lost weight, was eating healthier, and sported a pleasant smile on her face that drew people to her like bees to honey. Through helping her son, she had found herself and her life's purpose as well.

There were even a few suitors courting her and charming her with nice gifts. She was happy.

They were not alone. The lynx girl decided to unite forces with her friend and joined them on their travels around the world, giving talks, interviews, seminars, and workshops. When they stopped at any coastal city, the mermaid boy made a commitment to visit the mermaid communities in the area. There he enlightened them on his cause and purpose. Everywhere they went, everywhere he stopped, the reception of people was mesmerizing. There really is love in the world, and there really are amazingly loving people capable of an understanding that goes beyond the boundaries of the self.

With each step taken, more awareness was created, and people started to become more open-minded. Even the elusive mermaids started to come out and show their presence. Coastal towns were thriving in businesses related to the sea—from education on marine life to water sports, gastronomy, arts and crafts, you name it. Even the mermaids were profiting from this as people became accustomed to their presence. One could see mermaids offering swimming and diving lessons and singing and giving concerts in cool on-the-rocks venues by the seashore. They were artistic creatures, sensitive to all that called for beauty and sweetness of the heart.

The lynx girl had her way, too, and used the time to explore the urban realms by climbing on rooftops and terraces to get a better view of that world she had little contact with. After all, she was a country girl.

The time came to visit their beach village, to see what had happened there during their absence and what was going on now. The mermaid boy sweated with anticipation. He was nervous thinking about how they would receive them. Plus he wanted to visit his deep-water friends. As they came into town, all seemed

calm and unchanged. But never be fooled by what you see on the surface. When they got to the waterfront promenade, a large group was gathered there with pamphlets and big signs. The mermaid boy held his breath and started praying. His thoughts were so deep and so high he felt the touch of angels by his side.

People had been expecting their arrival. Pamphlets shared the beauty of universal love, and the signs showed welcoming words for the arriving guests. They were all in shock. Were they in the same town they had fled in such despair? As people gain access to knowledge and understand things for their true color, they become more open and receptive to differences, celebrating them as a way of growth, prosperity, and love. Auntie was the first to see them, and with joy she yelled a rehearsed welcoming cheer, and everybody followed her. City representatives gave their speeches, people were recognized for their good actions, everybody sang and shook hands, and the ceremony ended on a high note.

The mermaid queen, sitting on a rock, started singing the most beautiful, breathtaking melody anybody had ever heard. The sun was setting in golden, blue, and purple tones. The sea was calm, and the air quiet. Everybody was in awe of her beauty and the alluring powers of her singing. Love could be felt in the atmosphere.

As people began to disperse and the mermaid boy was rushing to give the queen a big hug, a rumor in the audience brought it all to a halt. Some people fell to their knees, some started crying, some opened their arms and embraced the skies, and yes, there were some that had no clue what was happening and missed it all. By the rocks, standing beside the mermaid queen was Mother Mary with her white dress, light blue shawl, and bright, loving heart. She gave blessings to all and disappeared as the sun went down.

The mermaid boy couldn't contain the happiness in his heart.

He felt so blessed by all that had happened. The queen gave him a big hug and thanked him for his work. Now her community could be free to swim the shores and share their beauty with the world. The mermaid boy looked around and gave thanks in full gratitude, sending heartfelt blessings to all.

He kissed his mom on the cheek and gave the lynx girl a hug, then jumped into the water to go celebrate with his mermaid friends in the deepest part of the ocean.

THE IMPORTANCE OF LOVE

This era of telecommunications and instant knowledge brings with it the exposure to realities that have always existed but have been hidden by social paradigms, religious constraints, and cultural constructs. As life moves faster than what one can grasp, some of this knowledge is not totally processed by society and therefore causes friction.

The story of the mermaid boy is a metaphor for the problems transgender people might face throughout their lives. Have you ever put yourself in the shoes of somebody having to hide their reality to be accepted and respected? It's not fair for people born with gender identity issues to be punished, pushed, and discriminated. In a modern democratic and open society, everybody should have the same rights. Having rights implies freedom of expression, within models of love and respect, and absolutely deserving to be valued for who you are.

If you are a transgender youth, always face your reality with honesty and love for yourself, and seek the proper help to become the person your soul calls you to be. If you are not and are faced with transgender discussions in your environment, become informed and

open your heart to diversity. There is nothing more thriving than a society that works together for the best of all.

Once our mermaid boy found his truth, he had to find the compassion within himself to be able to convey his message. Only by sharing his truth through an open heart was his audience capable of understanding his reality. Knowledge can lead to understanding, a powerful word that can, in turn, lead to higher appreciation of the self, be that one's self or another. When you understand something deep from the heart, you let go of judgment and fear, because you are empowered by universal love.

Love as you would like to be loved and call the universe to shine its light through you. Life will be better that way. Trust yourself. Be strong.



Astrid

The Comet

THE ENVIRONMENT

She was such a beautiful, smart, and sweet girl. No one could deny it. Her giggles were so contagious and her imagination so vivid. She was always creating the most amazing stories and games that all on the block loved and enjoyed. She grew up in a poor neighborhood with her single mother and her parade of boyfriends. Mother had the idea she couldn't make it through life without a man. She had had all sorts of specimens, from the hardworking dude to the unemployed slacker. None of them had become significant in the girl's life, and none of them had even tried to become a father figure for her, so she was always longing, always dreaming, always hoping she would find a daddy one day. But instead, Mother brought yet another man to their space.

This one was different. That was clear to anyone's eyes. No one could figure out what Mother saw in him and why she brought him home. He was rude, dirty, lazy, and foul-mouthed. He smoked like there would be no tomorrow, was always touching himself, and had no job. Perfect! But Mother had that deep belief that a house without a man is not a home, and so she fooled herself about this guy,

thinking he would save her life. But somebody had to bring bread to the table, so Mother was working three jobs, running from one to the other with no time to consider or even care about what her man was doing and how her little girl would be spending her days.

One evening, the dude came home drunk and violent, angry for some reason not even he could explain. The girl was sitting on her bed doing her homework when he entered the room. What he did to her was beyond explanation. It had hurt her not only physically but deep within her soul. He, with his bad breath and foul manners, had smashed all her illusions in a snap. When she told Mother, Mother turned against her and told her she was just jealous of what Mother had. She was a bad girl; she needed to shut up and not to speak nonsense again. She wasn't sure what had wounded her more, his brutality or Mother's denial. The girl was broken, not even fully a woman and already broken.

THE SOCIAL INTERACTIONS

She had been always a good student, an active participant in her school's activities. But suddenly and with no one knowing why, she started to become distracted, and her grades went down. She even stopped going to gym class or taking part in what she used to enjoy before. With time, skipping classes became her habit, and she wandered the streets without purpose.

She was pretty and had a sway in her walk that made her very attractive. She turned heads and received many admiring looks, but she was angry with the world and felt disgusted with herself, so she paid no attention and let them pass. One warm day, though, when the sun was high and hot, she was walking down her street at a few degrees from melting when she saw that yellow car. She had seen it

before but just passing. Today the car was parked on her street, and the owner was leaning on it, looking elegant and composed in spite of the heat. He was charming, and he knew it. For some reason, she had that fantasy about him, that he could be her father. When he smiled at her and spoke with gentle, kind words, she was lost, lost in his web. He offered to take her for a ride, invited her for ice cream (they never had ice cream at home!), and then to the park and to meet some friends. That day, she left her mother's tiny apartment dressed in her mini shorts and T-shirt, her only possessions really, and was never to return.

THE BELIEFS

She had no clue of her fate. She was living a dream, wandering up in the clouds with no attachment to reality. The man with the yellow car was no better than any she had known, but he had smiled at her and said sweet things, bought her ice cream and took her to the park. Who does that, can you tell me? *Of course*, she thought ... *Daddy!*

Toward the end of the day, when she sadly thought this dream would end, he invited her to a party. He said it was in her honor, to celebrate her beauty and youth. She couldn't imagine it. Somebody that could spend a whole day pampering her and, on top of that, celebrating her? Yes, she thought, he was her daddy. They arrived at the party where everybody was already in the mood, dancing and drinking and laughing. She saw many girls with their daddies, sitting on their laps. How sweet, she thought, hoping Daddy would invite her too and become affectionate toward her. Her pure innocence wasn't allowing her to see the truth. That was no father-daughter celebration but the start of her new life.

THE LURING AND THE LIES

Daddy brought her a soda and a piece of cake. She was thrilled! She devoured the cake and drank her soda as if it was the first time she had tried such precious liquid. He took her to the dance floor and then asked her to dance for the audience. She was feeling a little dizzy but was so happy she didn't stop to consider it. Everybody applauded her, and her joy went to the roof. Daddy gave her another soda and asked her if she would like to try her first alcoholic drink. She looked at him in disbelief. "Are you serious?" she asked. "Would you allow me?" He responded with a smile, yes. Wow, and on top of it all, he trusted her and considered her a grown-up girl. Wasn't she lucky?

She didn't like her drink very much, but she drank it just to show Daddy she trusted him, too, and was thankful for his generosity.

THE RABBIT HOLE

The drink made her feel exhilaration and a sense of carelessness she had never experienced. She took her shoes off and started dancing a frantic dance she didn't even know she could. All daddies were fascinated and applauded and cheered her to keep going. After every dance, Daddy gave her a drink. After every drink, she felt more and more confused, but her heart kept her moving, for this was the best that had happened to her in a very, very long time. She kept dancing until all went black, empty, and still.

She woke up the next morning hurting and disoriented. She didn't know where she was, what time and day it could be. A tall woman with a lot of makeup walked into the room and yelled, "Girls, breakfast! Hurry!" It was then that the girl noticed she was not alone. There were three other girls in the room, dressing up and putting makeup on. They were discussing things she couldn't understand,

counting money and hiding it under the mattress, swearing and then laughing, and then rushing out of the room as if nothing had happened. Where was she? She couldn't make it out. The room had closed windows, and one couldn't see outside.

The woman with the makeup came back and yelled to her, "What do you think, you're on vacation? Come, hurry, you need to go to work." Work? She was a child and still in school. What was this woman talking about? Where was her mother? She needed to call her and ask her to pick her up. The woman looked at her as she was speaking Chinese, turned around and slammed the door behind her.

She looked for her clothes. Her T-shirt was torn and her shorts stained. She couldn't remember what had happened, but she knew. She cried bitterly, disconsolate tears of pain and pity, and she was now also scared. Then the woman with the makeup came back with a red dress and a pair of high-heeled shoes. "Hurry, wear this. He's coming soon and won't be happy to see you're not ready." Then she left the room.

She tried to escape, looking for a window that would open, but all had metal bars on the outside and were too small for a person to go through. The woman with the makeup entered and found her doing this. She grabbed her by the hair and slapped her in the face. "Never try that again, stupid girl. You belong to him now and must obey!" She put that ugly red dress on and tried to walk in the high heels. She barely made it to the table outside the room where the woman gave her breakfast, a meager, bitter tea that made her feel numb, devoid of willpower, empty, detached.

THE CONFLICT

She was dragged to a long, dark corridor with a myriad of doors to each side. She was assigned a tiny room with a bed, a chair, a sink, a ceiling fan, and a lamp with a red bulb. She sat on the bed, disconsolate and confused. One could hear banging, grunting, and screaming coming from the other rooms. It reminded her of her mother's boyfriend, and she started crying again.

She sat on the bed and kept crying. A fat man entered the room and gave her a nasty look. She cried even more. In fact, she cried the whole day nonstop until her eyes were so swollen she could barely keep them open. She would have screamed, but tears were the only expression she could manage. It was deep in the night when she made it back to the room she shared with the other girls, and she was still crying. She got into bed and closed her eyes, hoping all would go away. One of the girls gave her a bag with something in it and said, "Take this in small doses and you'll feel better."

She did and ... oh! What was that? She felt a sense of expansion, something like happiness that turned into euphoria, laughter, and carelessness. She suddenly felt like flying. She went through the roof up to the clouds, crossed their threshold and kept going up. She felt like a comet, a shooting star, up in the sky, flying free, no body weight, no pain, no attachment. Wasn't what she was seeing beautiful? She was overlooking the city, magnificent with all its tiny lights twinkling at the distance like a carpet of precious gems. How beautiful, she thought, if that place could be filled with love and true goodness. She woke up to the yelling of the woman with the makeup. It was time to go to work again.

THE ABUSE

She took another bit of the substance from the bag, and off she went to that dark corridor with its endless line of doors to spend another long day being pushed and obliged to please men she didn't even know. But tonight, when she was walking back to her quarters, she saw Daddy. She began to run toward him. He had come to save her!

He raised his eyebrows, gave her an angry look, said something to the woman with the makeup, then turned and left. The woman with the makeup grabbed her by the arm so hard it left ugly marks for days. "He is angry," she told her. "You stupid girl, you're not performing well, not doing your job, you slacker. Let's see if you learn. You won't have anything to eat tonight." She went to bed with an empty stomach, took the substance, and went flying like a comet. It was exhilarating, almost surreal. This time the lights were shooting rays of yellow and red to the sky, and the stars were fighting back. She had the luck to witness a supernatural battle.

Next day, she was awakened at dawn. She had to hurry. She had a client waiting for her, and it was unimaginable to leave him waiting. Half-asleep, half up in the air, she attended her client. And so it went, day after day, night after night.

THE ETERNAL TRAP

When she had that substance, she felt liberated from her body, transported to another world where she felt no pain, no disgust, no pity. Her addiction to the substance had turned her into a comet with no control and no sense of reality. She fought for it, worked extra time for it, betrayed, lied, and stole for it. She had lost her dignity and total sense of self. She was trapped in a blurry, swirling world where she

couldn't discern anymore between reality and hallucination, between truth and false perception.

The last stab she got was Daddy's deceit and hostility. She had had so much hope he would be different, would save her, would take her away from that ugly place and her horrific life. The realization that he was the cause of that place and that life broke her heart and defeated her spirit. My dear, there is no one outside of yourself who can truly save you, unless that person acts from true and uninterested love.

When she was lucky enough to get the substance, she could go flying to a magic world. Oh, was everything so pretty! The streets shiny, the houses shimmering, the people happy.

One night, the woman with the makeup took several of the girls to a private party. The girl was already high when she got there, but a world of other possibilities opened up, and she tried all the substances that were offered to her. She was living an addict's dream. She took a deep breath and looked around her. The place was so elegant, with stained-glass windows and amazing chandeliers. The furniture was so unique and modern, and all the guests so fancy. She had never seen anything so elegant before. She had a really good time, danced with just about everyone, talked and laughed and made good friends. Well, that was what she recalled and told her roommates.

The woman with the makeup didn't agree with her tale. She was so mad; our comet girl had ruined everything! The other girls agreed. It was horrifying to see her act the way she did.

She turned into a radical comet, bouncing from wall to wall, breaking windows, flying over people's heads and then vomiting on their shoes, falling on top of tables and throwing food at other guests. She was completely out of herself. She had ruined the party and the gains, on top of wrecking the place. Not that the place was

fancy but a warehouse with beanbags for couches, rough and secretly underground.

She kept on behaving this way for every “event” they had, for every “meeting” she had. She was a reckless comet, with no self-control, reasoning, or respect—respect toward herself, I mean!

The man with the yellow car, the so-called daddy, was reaching his limits. He had never faced somebody so infuriating, selfish, and ungrateful. He just couldn’t believe this girl he bought ice cream for and was allowing to sleep under his roof was paying him back like this. His retribution was to take away the substance from her and see how she would react and come back to her senses. But when you take an addict’s source of addiction, they go into withdrawal. They get sick. They stop functioning. Yes, when she was high, she was a comet, but when she was low, she was a crawling rodent that didn’t serve any purpose. She spent days in bed, with fever, shivers, and hallucinations. It was a nightmare to watch, and the other girls took pity on her.

One day, the daddy made his decision, and all was to change in her life again.

THE TERROR

She woke up, and it was dark and cold, and all felt like it was in movement. She heard voices of other women she couldn’t recognize. When her eyes adjusted to her horror, she realized she was in the back of a truck with a group of very slim and scared-looking women. The vehicle came to a halt, men talking outside, laughing and joking. Then the door opened, and rays of bright light came rushing in, making them squint.

The man receiving the cargo made a happy face, like he was

looking at meat for his feast. One by one, he made the women get off the truck, inspected them, and sent them to the office to register. It was in the countryside. She had arrived on a farm! What had happened? How? Due to her lack of performance, her sweet “daddy” had sold her to a produce company to work in their harvest. Twentieth-century reality!

Well, she thought, working a whole day in the sun was so much better than the nasty job she had before, so this could be heaven. Not so fast! Stop making assumptions. You might fall into the same trap as before.

She was assigned to a plot with other women. They slept in a hut with no windows, on foam mattresses on the floor. They had to use a latrine some distance away, and showers were allowed every other day. They all got uniforms and a set of gloves and clippers.

The first day of work was hard but so liberating. Being outdoors, being able to talk to the other women, seeing the sky and hearing the birds sing was pure joy for our comet girl. The week went by, and as the weekend came, the men started arriving to the camp. The rule was men had their needs, and girls were there to help them out. When she realized what that meant, she had a terrible panic attack. She had thought those nightmare days were over!

THE DEPRESSION

Three times she ended up pregnant. The first time was the saddest of all. She couldn't figure out what was wrong with her. She felt dizzy and had morning sickness, so she was sent to the infirmary. Not a happy place, especially when run by an ugly, angry, fat woman in a white dress. When she was examined, it was soon determined the cause of her sickness, and a friend's clinic was called for duty. There

was no time to lose; she had to keep working, and the “problem” needed to be eradicated as soon as possible. After her third abortion, she had turned numb to the fact that in her belly there was a life growing that would never see the light.

She wished she had that substance again to keep her disconnected and up in the magic sky. She had made a promise to herself to keep sober and never be fooled again. Well, that had not worked out as well either. Look where she was, a modern slave!

Some promises are hard to keep, especially when it involves something that has you trapped and makes you dependent on it. For the lack of substance, she became addicted to pain killers. Management accepted it, for that way, they could keep her in line, controlled and under their will. You may think drugs liberate you, but in truth they trap you to the point you lose your self will and are left at the mercy of those who profit from it.

Workweeks were hard; nevertheless, she somehow kept her mind busy, distracted, and out of her troubles. But weekends were a nightmare, a sorrow, a pain. The minute men started coming in, the sky turned black and stormy for our comet girl, and the rain in her eyes couldn't stop from falling. She was deeply depressed, sadly hopeless. She was angry and felt terribly lonely; the whole world around her had abandoned her, and she had nowhere to go. One day she decided to commit suicide. Easier said than done. She tried drowning in the river, pretending to fall into the stream, but the waters were too shallow, and there was no possibility to die from submersion. She tried cutting her veins with the clippers, but soon the supervisor saw it, and she ended up again in the infirmary with her favorite nurse as company. Finally, she found a corroded wire in the field. She took it to their hut while the other women were out working and tried to hang herself. She fixed it around a beam,

brought a chair, stepped on it, made a noose at end that allowed her head to fit though. Her heart was pounding, her hands sweaty, her feet cold, her mouth dry, but the promise to end her misery, to be able to leave the world and the life she was living gave her courage, an insane sense of satisfaction, and a troubling feeling of finally fulfilled expectations. It wasn't happiness, and it wasn't hope or quietude; she was terribly nervous, angry, and very, very sad. Her life had been short but so crowded with bad incidents she had no say or control over. She felt a total victim of circumstances and couldn't see a way out other than a quick and tragic escape.

A woman from her camp, the oldest in her group, had followed her. The woman's intuition had told her something wasn't right, so she walked to the hut and with quick reaction saved the girl's life. The girl resisted and fought back. Her whole life played in front of her like a horror movie. The saddest of all, she was still in it, still the main character. She was so angry, so frustrated. Not even dying was allowed to her! They struggled for a while, until the woman managed to pacify her, and then she took the girl back to the fields. They didn't want to call attention, the woman said, and end up getting arrested and suffer the consequences of having ten men on top of them. The horror of that idea made the girl react, and the woman managed to calm our comet girl as they walked back to the fields.

Later when having supper around a bonfire ... yes, once a week, on Wednesdays, they were allowed to gather around a fire and have their soup together ... the woman spoke to our comet girl. She told her she had been diagnosed with breast cancer and that her treatment had been denied by the company, too expensive and not worth trying. With no remorse, she had been given her death sentence. She told the girl, "You are still young, full of life. You have a loving spirit, entertaining and kind. And creative! When you talk, you captivate us

all. Your stories are filled with life and hope. You make us feel as if we were riding a comet traveling through the sky, free and happy. Trust yourself, girl. You have a great potential. Be creative and have faith.”

They became friends; it was the girl’s first true friend, and she was so happy. The woman was wise and sweet, and despite her bad luck in life, she kept a positive attitude toward things. She taught the girl the power of prayer, the incommensurable value of an open heart, and the strength of faith. The girl asked her, “Then why did you end up here if those things you told me about myself are so powerful?”

The woman looked at the girl and calmly said, “I had to tell you so you could move forward in your life.” That night, the woman passed away with a smile on her face.

The girl cried for days. She had finally made a friend, and it was taken from her so quickly. But she remembered the woman’s words. Had she truly been talking to her? Was she the person that kind soul was describing? Her life had been so filled with down moments that she had never stopped to see the qualities she had when she was truly herself, beautiful inside and out.

There must be a way out, she thought. *There must be*. And for the first time, she kneeled in prayer and asked the universe for help, to send her an answer, a miracle.

DO YOU WANT TO TALK ABOUT THIS?

I have been awfully quiet, not making comments. I didn’t want to distract you from this story with my opinions, but I think it’s time for a chat. Don’t you agree?

Silence is what we encounter with the mention of this topic. It is so deeply horrifying, society prefers to turn its back to the issue rather than fight it and fix it. Human trafficking is one of the most

horrendous problems of modern society. You thought that slavery was abolished in 1863 with the Emancipation Proclamation? Oh dear, that was Abraham Lincoln's dream but not the one of many who like to profit from the abuse of others.

Modern slavery has many forms and therefore many levels too, many faces and many, oh so many victims—from illegal immigrants to neglected children, hopeless women, and desperate men. It touches prostitution and forced labor. It works with the weaknesses, the fears, and the lowest of energies of people to make them dependable, frightened, and downhearted. Its tools are deceit, trickery, and abuse, managing deep networks of drugs, arms, and people trafficking.

Thank God there are organizations, hotlines, and people fighting to create awareness of this terrible issue, but it's just the beginning. Let's have hope and pray for the victims of abuse, to find a way out of their misery.

You understand now why your parents always told you not to trust strangers? Well, there you go! If you're young, listen to your parents' advice, and as you grow up and build your opinion and criteria about things, be cautious about to whom you give your trust. I don't want to discourage you and have you close up like a clam. Always carry an open heart and a happy, friendly spirit, but don't be stupid. The grass is never greener on the other side of the fence. If you're unhappy, look around, inform yourself, find somebody you trust, and ask for help. If you know of somebody that suffers from abuse, drug addiction, and manipulation, speak up. That person might need your help, and you might be their only hope.

Let's go back and see how our comet girl is doing.

THE FALL AND THE RISE

Her depression had escalated to the point where her abandonment was worrying her camp companions. She stopped talking, was barely eating, and had stopped cleaning herself. From the creative comet all knew, she had turned into that crawling rodent she used to be when out of substance. She somehow felt she was not in her senses, but when had she been? Despite all, she remembered her friend's words and started praying every night before bedtime. Somehow as her prayers became stronger, her troubles diminished, and she had some weekends when she wasn't even molested and could enjoy herself in solitude.

Prayer has a force beyond our limited imagination. When we put ourselves in prayer, our vibration changes. It becomes higher, connecting us to that of the universe and through it all, and our energy becomes one with the divine.

THE VOICE

One night she couldn't sleep and started praying in silence, as the other women were already asleep. Suddenly the door to the hut opened, and a bright blue light shined in. Curiously, she didn't get scared. The ambience was warm, and there was a calm energy in the air. Suddenly all was silence, pure immaculate silence, and then the most beautiful man's voice called her. "I am the archangel Michael," he said. "I am here to protect and guide you. Come, walk with me. It is time for you to leave this place." She got up and walked, and the gate to her field was open, and so was the gate to the main quarters and to the property, and she walked and walked for three consecutive days, through forests and rivers, avoiding being seen. They were looking for her, angry and armed, but they couldn't see her. They

were looking for a lonely woman, lost and in disarray, but the only thing some reported to have seen was a very tall man with a powerful hallow of light around him and a beautiful girl walking a few steps ahead of him. No one even considered stopping and asking where they were going. They just seemed on a mission, and everybody felt it best to leave them to their task.

Archangel Michael is a very benevolent and kind angel, very powerful and so very honest. If one calls for help, he is the first in attending. He is determined and guides you to be too as he sends you straightforward messages. His beautiful energy is so assuring, and you can feel his warmth as soon as you think of him. I love Archangel Michael, my protector.

She arrived in a town near nightfall. There were friendly faces in the street and a sense of community our comet girl was surprised to see. It was getting dark, and she was tired, so she found a hole in a fence and sneaked into what looked like a park. She found some nice bushes and laid her bed under them. It felt like a summer night, and the jasmine flowers were sharing their lovely scent. She was thankful for being alive and safe. She slept like she had not for a long, long time. Next morning as she was crawling out of the bushes, a boy was looking at her. He had a friendly face, but ... *Oh no, that won't fool me*, she thought. *No, no, no, no!* Those days were gone and forever.

The boy was handsome and genuine with a friendly face and loving eyes. But our comet girl was so scared of her previous traumas she pushed him away, was rude to him, and kept running away to safer grounds every time she saw him coming. She was hungry, though, and had nothing to eat. So desperate she was, she started picking for food in the park's trash cans. When the loving boy saw this, he reacted and ran to get her something to eat. Shortly he came back with yogurt, a banana, and a bun. The girl didn't want anything

to do with it, so he left the food by the bushes where she had made her home. And so it went for weeks. He left her food twice a day so she could have something nutritious to eat. He was truly a good boy, and he wanted to help her, but he understood she needed time, and he had enough patience for both to wait. He didn't give up on her. He didn't mind her rude manners and her indifference toward him. He had seen her below the surface and knew she was precious. He wanted to help her grow to her true potential.

THE FORGIVENESS

Our comet girl had gone through so much. She couldn't trust, she couldn't forgive, and those feelings of victimhood were corroding her good heart and possibilities to move forward and change her life. But the loving boy was there, determined to give her a hand. Why? Because he knew how it was, how it felt to be down and alone. He knew the importance of a friend. He knew that all good things come from a place of love. So he stood by her, leaving her notes and food and, when possible, talking to her, telling her what he thought and felt about things.

He wanted to show her where he lived, his family and friends, but she didn't want anything to do with it. She didn't want to go with him anywhere, still afraid she could be fooled and end up in another nightmare.

One day he decided to tell her his own story, in the hope it would help the girl find her way. He too grew up in a poor neighborhood, he too was molested at young age, and he too was abandoned by his family, in disbelief of what he had denounced. The church was sacred for his family, and their priest so holy, a temple of strength and support for their struggles. What he was saying was outrageous,

a terrible sin, so they turned their back on the boy and left him to the street where they felt he belonged. He begged, he stole, and he cried and suffered in solitude until one day he met lady mother. She was attending her roses when he passed by that little front garden. She invited him in, made him supper, and made him her son. She gave him education and love and helped him become the good person he was today. He still lived in lady mother's house, a place where anybody who wanted to come in was welcomed. Lady mother was one of those persons whose heart was larger than her physical body, somebody who radiated love and compassion, a wise woman with a warm smile.

Since our comet girl was so skeptical, he gave her the address of lady mother's house so she could go on her own, check it out, and make her own decision. The girl, whose heart was slowly softening to the boy's benevolence, took the address and walked to see the place with her own eyes. It was in a lovely neighborhood with cute chalets painted in pastel colors, with a picket fence, a front garden, and a peaceful backyard. The streets were lined with shade trees. There were kids playing in the streets and people walking their dogs, and everybody seemed to be happy, greeting each other with care and respect. When she came to the front of the house, she saw a tall older woman of color taking care of her garden. She was distractedly singing a melody that the girl found so enticing, so familiar, tears came to her eyes. That woman had something about her that was so beautifully strong and sweet.

That night, the girl prayed and in her prayers asked Archangel Michael for advice, a sign she could easily understand and know if lady mother was good for her too. The next morning as she was walking the park, like she did every day, two girls were talking, and our comet girl couldn't help but listen. They were talking about lady

mother, how good and generous she was to all who needed help, how she always kept her doors open to receive and give a hand to those who might need her warm advice and her loving care. Our comet girl was astonished by the clarity of the message. Had this been staged? Were they referring to the same lady mother the loving boy talked about? By the warmth on her side, she knew Archangel Michael was there showing her the answer to her prayer. She was so grateful.

That afternoon, when she saw the loving boy, she approached him, thanked him for his help, and asked him to introduce her to lady mother. The boy couldn't contain himself out of joy. He knew this was just the beginning of her way to salvation and growth.

When lady mother saw them coming, she took off her apron and ran to receive them with open arms. The second our comet girl and lady mother's eyes met, they both knew there was a deep connection between the two of them. There were no words to be said, just an enormous feeling and a profound knowing that their souls were meant to come together.

Lady mother gave the girl a room in her house, and for the first time in her whole life, she slept with no worries and no fear. She was so grateful in her prayers, she forgave her mother and all who had done so much harm to her. She was finally able to release them from her life and set herself free.

THE FIGHTING FORCE

First thing lady mother did was to help our comet girl heal from her addictions. Easier said than done, but she knew how to read a soul and conquer a heart. Everything had to start from the person and a deep understanding of their mental structure. Those sabotaging stories one tells oneself, that set of beliefs one carries through life,

the fears and destructive thoughts that keep attacking one's integrity, self-control, and self-love. It took them hard work, long walks, and mind-opening conversations to get to a point where the girl could name and face her troubles to move forward to the next step.

Once she had identified her sabotaging stories, she had to truly forgive herself, as she had forgiven others. Not forgiving oneself leads to self-blame and low self-esteem, and with it, a life of failure, regret, and entrapment. Lady mother, as did the loving boy, could see so much potential in our comet girl; they would not leave her to her own mercy. They were certain that inside her was a creative, loving, brilliant soul ready to shine through and enlighten the world.

Love is a life force, the biggest motivator of all. When the girl saw and felt the support and trust those two were giving her, she stood up to her fears, fought back, and started her process of healing.

THE WILLPOWER

All it takes for one to move forward is the willingness and commitment to oneself to do so. Trust your heart, trust your soul's calling, listen to your highest self, listen to the divine power within you, and act upon it with an open heart.

Our comet girl felt so grateful to have found these people, to be given a second chance in life, to be able to get out of all her misery and move forward. She was learning so much from lady mother, not only how to take care of herself but also how to find her purpose in life and make something out of it. She had discovered a love for baking and could spend hours in the kitchen creating the most amazing recipes and confections that could melt anybody's taste buds. It was lovely to see her creativity rise to the sky when mixing ingredients together and trying to bring forth new dishes, new culinary miracles to life.

Her speech had become so much more inspiring too. With the knowledge she acquired about herself, her stories became even more captivating and original. She could capture an audience right from the beginning of her tale, and she gained some fame around the community. Every Friday at sundown, kids and adults alike started coming to lady mother's front garden to listen to whatever story she had for them that night. After that, there was a feast of baked goodies for everybody to enjoy.

She had never been more driven. She woke up early every day, attended lady mother's herbal garden, went to the market to get her produce, and spent most of her day in the kitchen. Before sunset, she took a walk with the loving boy and then went to prepare her story to be shared with the community that week. She was so organized, so professional in her commitment, so inspired by an intangible force that was growing inside her. Our comet girl was growing to her true potential, discovering her life's purpose by keeping an open mind, a grateful heart, and a curious ear to all positive voices that came her way.

Lady mother was so proud of her girl! Their friendship had deepened to a point where sometimes words didn't have to be spoken, for they knew what the other would think, do, or say. One could breathe in harmony in their house. There was always music and laughter and good conversation, and all that was the source of their prosperity and abundance. They were neither rich nor poor, monetary wise. Don't be confused. Prosperity and abundance of love and gratefulness are states of the mind, positive vibrations that bring and attract more of the same, making one's life a channel of universal goodness and happiness that brings to one's existence a sense of humble success, satisfaction, and—yes, you got it—true harmony.

THE HEALING

When the mind is at peace, it allows for miracles to shine in. The ego-based fears recede, the heart opens, and we are receptive to higher vibrations, allowing goodness to pour into our lives. Our comet girl was feeling the moment. She had never felt loved and supported before, but not only that, she had never valued for what she truly was, a noble, beautiful being with a big heart, enormous creativity, and so much to give.

Lady mother had taught her to allow herself to receive as well. Difficult task, let me tell you, for first you need to forgive yourself for any blame you might carry around and then practice self-love with a full and humble heart. The loving boy had an important part in that too. He and our comet girl became friends as she slowly allowed herself to be cherished and appreciated, and as time passed, there was a sweet feeling of romantic love growing between the two of them. It was beautiful to watch them walk holding hands, with Archangel Michael close behind. Every moment shared, every experience lived together was a precious gift for them, and they made sure to always be grateful for what they had. He had the willpower, she the creativity, and together they were unstoppable in whatever endeavor they put their minds and hearts to.

Together they started an animal shelter for all those sweet creatures abandoned and tortured by cruel and bitter people. When it was up and running with success, they created a house for neglected children, like they had once been, where they offered education, psychological support, and lots of love. The animal shelter served as a healing school, while her bakery taught cooking skills, and the gardens around lady mother's house offered positive recreation for all to enjoy. Kids loved to go there, for there was always something

fun to do, something cool to learn, but most of all, there was always love for everyone and those fun stories our comet girl shared with the community every Friday night. Some kids came to live at the house, and some came and went as they needed. The house was buzzing with life, and as all positive energies, their love was growing to a point they couldn't live without each other anymore.

Oh, rejoice! There were sounds of bells in the air, and our comet girl and the loving boy filled their heads and hearts with loving wedding plans. Lady mother felt so happy, so satisfied to see those children she so deeply loved grow successful, happy, and in love.

The day of the wedding finally came. They had decided to set it up at the park under the big oak trees adorned with lanterns. It was a lovely spring evening, and fireflies were playing tricks in the air. Kids were running around joyfully, and the atmosphere was cheerful. Our comet girl had prepared the banquet herself! And everything looked amazing on the picnic tables. When she showed up, there was a general sound of awe, and everybody couldn't help but let some tears flow, filled by emotion and gratitude for that sweet, beautiful girl. The sweet couple was so happy as they ate, danced, and celebrated their day with a full heart. For our comet girl, it was certainly the first of very happy days in her life. She could now rest assured all was well, her ground safe, her heart fulfilled. She was so grateful, she stepped aside for a moment to thank Archangel Michael and all angels who had helped her out of trouble. She gave thanks for all she had, for her husband and for lady mother. A warm feeling embraced her. She was safe.

IF IT HELPS, CONSIDER THIS ...

It's beautiful to see how a good heart is rewarded with goodness. Our comet girl could call upon herself the goodness of the universe when she cleaned up her mental clutter, forgave herself and others, and saw herself as a worthy being—smart, creative, and beautiful.

The process wasn't easy for her, since from such a young age she had been exposed to hate, abuse, and disappointment. She didn't know better. Her baggage was filled with regret, pain, and low appreciation of her true self. In circumstances like hers, it seems easy to fall into addictions, to look for an easy way out of all the pain. But drugs don't set you free. Drugs make you a slave, trapping you in false and temporary illusions, for the pain persists and becomes stronger as you lose yourself in the hands of those who acquire power over you and manipulate you in your dependency. Drugs erode your mind and deprive you of making your own decisions, of standing up for yourself and claiming your spiritual and emotional freedom. Always be aware of this. Drugs are not the solution to your problems.

The universe is filled with positive energy, with benevolence and love. It is up to us to let all that energy flow into ourselves. We are the creators of our reality, and we allow or don't allow things to happen to us. And how is this possible? Through prayer and meditation, by silencing the mind, grounding and connecting to the highest good, and by listening to the deep truth the divine wants to shine through us. Faith, gratefulness, forgiveness, standing one's ground, honesty, and self-love are key forces to always carry with you, for they are the channels that will allow you to find your true purpose and succeed in life.

If you're young and are suffering abuse, please know you can find help. Don't keep the suffering to yourself. Speak up! Abuse is not

your fault. Just don't allow it. You are loved and deserve dignity and respect. Embrace this truth with a loving heart. Fear is the abuser's tactic to keep you trapped. Always look inside yourself; there is nobody better than your higher self to give you a hint, a push, and the courage to move forward. Look for somebody with a good heart that cares for you. Talk to your parents or your teacher. You are not alone. Don't fall for the false, the illusion of something better. Remember, the grass is the greenest just where you are. Trust yourself. You are loved and so worthy of all the good things life can bring. Have faith, think positive, be grateful.

Afterword

Through these four stories, we touched topics that affect us as humans and as cultural, social entities. We discussed emotional abuse, social discrimination, fear-based judgment, addiction, and slavery, all issues that somehow distress the foundations of our youth today and in a certain way determine their view of life.

I believe in love, in honesty, in gratitude, and in sharing of the positive. No matter how bad your existence looks, know that you are loved, so love yourself back. The most serious causes of failure, depression, and codependency are lack of self-esteem and seeing oneself as victim of circumstances and of others. Always remember this: we create our own reality from a construct of borrowed and learned statements supposedly understood as social, cultural, and religious truth. What is important to understand is that we are one with all, and therefore, as interconnected energetic beings, what we do, think, or say affects the world and attracts to us more of the same. If we see ourselves as failures, more will come to us. So please, always look at yourself with love and care for who you truly are, a beautiful creation of the divine.

When you're down, it seems very hard to see the light at the end of the tunnel. You rather feel like you're walking on eggs in a dark room. But know you are not alone. Have faith and pray. Ask for help; ask God and the angels to guide you in the best of intentions for your

highest good and that of all involved. Here is a tip: prayer has the force to set your energetic vibrations in higher frequency, making you a better target for positive energies to be attracted by you. As your awareness shifts to oneness with your higher self, with spirit, you get to understand that heaven and hell reside within you. Thus, the side you feed is the one that will guide your life and configure your perceived reality.

The more you open your heart to goodness, the more flows to you. Always speak to yourself with honesty, forgiveness, and gratefulness. Listen with an open heart to what the universe wants to shine through you, treat others with kindness and respect, and act in accordance with the highest truth.

Be resilient, be flexible, be receptive to universal love, and be blessed.

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Thank you to my guardian angel for calling me to write, to my friend Linda Blochberger, for helping me edit these stories, and Ryota Iwai, for taking my portrait picture, and to Balboa Press, for making this book a reality.

Beauty kills the Beast transports us to imaginary worlds through very real stories. Four short tales, told as metaphors to actual societal issues, state the struggles of young characters' facing emotional abuse, social discrimination, transgender identity, drugs and human trafficking. Each story introduces us to the circumstances and emotional conditions lived by each character, under a close analysis of the author where she calls our attention to issues of self-esteem, respect for oneself and others, forgiveness, gratitude and love, and invites us, the reader, to voice our own point of view and face our own fears to empower ourselves for a better world. Each story faces the problem, goes through an analysis and opens to the endless possibilities of a life lived with love, knowing that all good is within and that with positive mindfulness and faith one can achieve the unthinkable and overcome any obstacles. The book is addressed to the young at heart and its intention is to shed light on modern issues and give a hand in the search for one's power and true love.



ASTRID HOFFMANN was born in Chile where she pursued a career in architecture. A deep calling for change brought her to the US where she received her citizenship and Masters in Landscape Architecture, profession she has been practicing for the past 14 years. She currently lives in Florida, where she found her home. Her hobbies are painting and mix media, learning about crystal energy, walking and reading. She has a strong believe in Angels for she feels their positive influence in her daily life. As she follows her heart for meaning and mindfulness, she felt to share what she sees and feels about the world and call the young to find their truth and strength in life. These are her first stories.



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